# EXPLORING THE BIBLE

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By arrangement with Harper and Brothers, publisher of "Exploring the Bible" by Frank E. Gaebelein, a special edition of this book has been prepared. As number of business men interested in the promotion of Bible study among young people have most kindly made it possible to send the book to leading schools and colleges throughout the country.

"Exploring the Bible" is written by the Headmaster of a boys' preparatory school. It aims to provide guiding principles and a background for a vital study of the Bible. The book is in no sense denominational propaganda; the author is a Presbyterian, but endeavors to present the message of the Bible apart from any sectarian interpretation.

In these days, when our young people are so sorely in need of influences that make for sturdy character, to neglect the study of the Bible is to pass by the greatest single force for right living that the world has ever known.

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# EXPLORING THE BIBLE

BOOKS BY

FRANK E. GAEBELEIN

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DOWN THROUGH THE AGES
A BRIEF SURVEY OF SCRIPTURE
EXPLORING THE BIBLE

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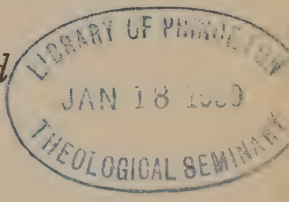
# EXPLORING THE BIBLE

*A Study of Background and Principles*




*by*

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EXPLORING THE BIBLE

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FIRST EDITION

I-D

To

D. L. M. G.

# PREFACE

THE chief sin of American education is a sin of omission. While our schools and colleges have room for all manner of studies, from Latin to athletic coaching, among all these there seems to be no place for one study of supreme importance. The Bible is practically excluded from our national education. To be sure, the American principle of separation of church and state rules out sectarian teaching from the public school. Yet it is an open question whether the Bible is a sectarian book, and whether its study as literature at least does not have in the public school a legitimate place. An encouraging sign is the growing practice in certain public schools of dismissing children at regular periods, so that week-day religious instruction may be given under the various churches. Notwithstanding, those schools and colleges, chiefly "private," that are making a thorough-going effort to accord the Bible a fair position in the curriculum, constitute only a small percentage of our institutions of learning.

But I have spoken of a "sin of omission." Why is this neglect of the Bible sinful, or at least mis-

taken? Professor Richard G. Moulton of Chicago and Cambridge has phrased the issue most convincingly. "It is," he wrote, "one of the curiosities of our civilization that we are content to go for our liberal education to literatures which, morally, are at an opposite pole from ourselves: literatures in which the most exalted tone is often an apotheosis of the sensuous, which degrade divinity, not only to the human level, but to the lowest level of humanity. Our hardest social problem being temperance, we study in Greek the glorification of intoxication; while in mature life we are occupied in tracing law to the remotest corner of the universe, we go at school for literary impulse to the poetry that dramatizes the burden of hopeless fate. Our highest politics aim at conserving the arts of peace; our first poetic lessons are in an Iliad that cannot be appreciated without a blood-thirsty joy in killing. We seek to form a character in which delicacy and reserve shall be supreme, and at the same time are training our tastes in literatures which, if published as English books, would be seized by the police. I recall these paradoxes, not to make objection, but to suggest the reasonableness of the claim that the one side of our liberal education should have another side to balance it. Prudish fears may be unwise, but there is no need to put an embargo on

decency. It is surely a good thing that our youth, during the formative period, should have displayed to them, in a literary dress as brilliant as that of Greek literature—in lyrics which Pindar cannot surpass, in rhetoric as forcible as that of Demosthenes, or contemplative prose not inferior to Plato's —a people dominated by an utter passion for righteousness, a people whose ideas of purity, of infinite good, of universal order, of faith in the inevitable downfall of all moral evil, moved to a poetic passion as fervid, and speech as musical, as when Sappho sang of love or Æschylus thundered his deep notes of destiny. When it is added that the familiarity of the English Bible renders all this possible without the demand on the time-table that would be involved in learning another language, it seems clear that our school and college curricula will not have shaken off their mediæval narrowness and renaissance paganism until Classical and Biblical literatures stand side by side as sources of highest culture." [1]

Professor Moulton's argument is unanswerable. The present neglect of the English Bible is indeed a sign that our schools and colleges are still bound by "mediæval narrowness and renaissance pagan-

1 *The Literary Study of the Bible,* Richard G. Moulton, preface, pp. xii, xiii. D. C. Heath & Company.

ism."[2] Public educators look askance at a book that is liable to raise the taboo issue of religion within the halls of public education. Independent educators—the heads of private schools and colleges —either fear to offend the various creeds represented by their students or are bound by the even greater terror of being thought so old-fashioned and illiberal as still to believe in the Bible. Indeed modern liberalism is just as stringent in its demands as was the old orthodoxy. And what thoughtful observer of our educational and social life can deny that "renaissance paganism" is to-day a force in school and society?

But strong as it is, Professor Moulton's argument appeals only to the intellectual and artistic faculties. Carry it a step farther into the spiritual realm, and its compelling power, for the Christian at least, is tremendously enhanced. For Christianity is peculiarly a religion of a single book. Take away the Bible and you have destroyed the means by which God chose to present through successive ages His revelation to man. It is true that, in the final analysis, Christianity rests not upon words but upon facts; the incarnation, the atonement, and the resur-

[2] It is but fair to state that the Bible was not always neglected in American education. Our first colleges and academies all gave the study of Scripture a prominent place, but with the rise of the public school the dominant secular influence has driven out the Bible.

rection constitute the basis of our faith, and they cover an actual series of events. Yet the Bible is the essential medium whereby we know of these facts; secular records, while recognizing the existence of Christ, are too meager ever to fill the place of the New Testament. It follows, then, that knowledge of the Bible is an indispensable prerequisite for growth in the Christian life. Whether or no education has room for Scripture, certainly the Bible is the one indispensable study which the individual Christian *must* by the command of his Lord pursue. Consequently no system of education, more specifically no school or college, that does not accord to the Bible adequate representation can rightly claim the designation of Christian.

For seven years it has been my privilege to be intimately associated with a school that has from its foundation been Christian not only in name but in organization. Without the timidity of the "mediæval narrowness" and uninfluenced by the "renaissance paganism" of which Professor Moulton speaks, the Stony Brook School has courageously given to the study of the English Bible an honored place as a subject required for three recitations a week throughout the entire secondary course. Academic standards have not suffered. The School has met the tests of regional accrediting agencies.

Graduates have entered college and have proved, by the quality of their work, the caliber of their preparation. So much for the fear, often expressed by cautious schoolmasters, that college requirements will not permit the expenditure of time for Bible study! That the Stony Brook School has done much more and has maintained a Christian atmosphere functioning vitally and reciprocally through faculty and student is beyond the province of these pages.

An institution such as this constitutes a working laboratory for the development of methods of Bible study. The classes of boys which I have taught in this subject have given me invaluable lessons. The present volume is an attempt to put in permanent form some of these lessons. Much of the material embodied in the following pages has either met the test of classroom use or is the outgrowth of classroom experience.

To some the book may at first seem lacking in definite detail and of almost too general a character. However, its purposes must be rightly understood. It aims to present underlying principles, not specific details. Bible teaching too often begins with the multitudinous facts with which both Old and New Testaments abound, and ignores the interpretation of these facts as part of the organic structure of

Scripture. The profound rationale of the Bible is an unmistakable proof of its inspiration. And an understanding of its rationale enables one to see in their vital relations the manifold details of Scripture as they come to him through further study.

Perhaps the strongest of the philosophical proofs for the existence of God is the old argument from design. All nature shows the evidence of an omniscient and omnipotent Creator. If science has done nothing else, it has discovered the work of a divine intelligence through revealing glimpses of the intricate and marvelous organization of the universe from the microcosm of the bacteriological slide to the macrocosm of the telescope. The mind that can resist the inescapable conclusion that a heavenly Architect framed the universe is staid indeed. To attribute the creation to an unknown chance is an ill-considered solution of the problem of the origin of things. Now the argument from design is nowhere more impressively evident than in Scripture. The Bible is an organic unity, a whole of strong yet intricate structure. Intelligent study of its plan can hardly help but convince the unbiased student of its supernatural origin. Ignorance of its plan renders much study of separate books and passages comparatively futile. A background of general principles will do much to help one to grasp the particular facts. Once the structure is understood,

the details gained from study of individual books and even from desultory reading can be seen in their proper relation to the plan of the Bible as a whole.

This is a book for youth. It should find its greatest usefulness among those in the upper grades of high school or in the first years of college. The adolescent mind has a definite tendency toward rationalization. Along with marked idealistic impulses is a persistent demand for proof, often expressed in an attitude of doubt. Through their insistence upon the principles [3] of structure and their emphasis upon design as seen in the Bible, the following pages are planned to meet the needs of the growing mind. Their tone is explanatory rather than argumentative, their purpose being to reveal the plan of the Bible and to awaken a sense of appreciative wonder at its beauty and perfection. Lead the youth to a grasp of the Biblical structure and he will have a sure background for further study. Stimulate his intellectual curiosity—above all else, arouse a spiritual hunger for the understanding of God's Word—and it is possible that he will strive independently to build up his knowledge of the Book of books.

As these are days of conflicting opinions regard-

[3] Whatever general laws or principles are set forth are to be regarded not as arbitrarily fixed but as working principles only.

ing vital issues of the Christian faith, brief mention should here be made of my point of view toward the Bible. By choice of conviction I am one of that great body of believers who prefer to be classed as evangelical and conservative in theology. I accept the Bible for what it claims to be—the unique and inspired Word of God, conveying to the heart of humanity the priceless knowledge of a divine Lord and Saviour. With "the assured results of the higher criticism and modern Biblical scholarship" I am familiar, but by no means entirely in sympathy. So long as every critical question from the unity of Genesis to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel is the source of those divergent opinions and conjectural hypotheses to which specialists in research are sometimes subject, I shall entertain no doubt regarding the authenticity of the book or any portion of it. After all, the Bible is its own witness to its authenticity, and it is not likely that those who have found a loving and redeeming Saviour through its pages and who daily receive spiritual sustenance from its reading will be greatly troubled about books falsely claiming antiquity and distinguished authorship through the subterfuge of any "pious fraud."

It remains finally to be said that in the preparation of a volume of this type many sources must

necessarily be consulted. To give in each case the reference would lead only to confusion by reason of an undue number of footnotes. Consequently but a few general references are given, the footnotes being reserved almost entirely for the Biblical citations, as being of more direct value to the reader. For those who are interested in class or individual study there is an appendix of questions and topics relating to each chapter. The book, however, is written not only for the Bible student but also for the general reader who desires to explore the background and message of the greatest of all classics—the English Bible.

FRANK E. GAEBELEIN

Stony Brook, Long Island
June, 1929

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# EXPLORING THE BIBLE

## *Chapter One*

### KNOWING THE BIBLE

WITHOUT a doubt many of the readers of this book have since early childhood heard much of the Bible. They have been taught to reverence it. Its stories have been told them by their parents, its outstanding verses learned in Sunday School. In a certain sense, nearly everyone knows something of Scripture. Yet it is easy for one to overestimate his knowledge of a subject, especially of a book so frequently discussed as the Bible. For instance, all have heard of Milton, but comparatively few have a really complete knowledge of his works. So often, in fact, is this great writer mentioned that the average man is liable quite unconsciously to persuade himself that he knows a good deal about an epic like "Paradise Lost," which he may never even have read.

The same is true of the Bible. The things taught at home, the facts learned in Sunday School, are splendid as an introduction. But in not many cases do they go far enough; they are but a beginning. And unfortunately there is many times linked with

this incomplete understanding a tendency to overestimate the knowledge already possessed. This is too bad, for it leads first of all to neglect of a wonderful book. When one thinks he is rather well-acquainted with a topic, he is not inclined to study it further. And the man who does not have an organized, intelligent knowledge of the Bible is sadly lacking in education. Dr. William Lyon Phelps, Professor of English Literature at Yale, put this important point in striking form when he said: "I thoroughly believe in a university education for both men and women; but I believe a knowledge of the Bible without a college course is more valuable than a college course without the Bible."

Merely from the point of view of education, then, a man must know the Bible if he is to be intelligent and well-informed. But education is by no means the only thing, or even the highest thing in life. Above the mental is the spiritual. This is the abiding value of life. A man's spiritual nature is of far greater value than anything else. The emphasis of Christ's life and teaching is centered, directly or indirectly, on the great worth of the human soul. And it is on this plane of the spiritual that the Bible is supreme, for it contains for the human soul a message of unique value. Great as literature, history and philosophy, it soars far above human wisdom

in what it says about eternity and the future of man and his relation to God. It is the only book that tells us about these things in detail and in a reasonable way. Above all, it is the only book that introduces us to Jesus Christ, the most outstanding figure in the history of the world.

These are words of high praise. Nevertheless, we are but repeating the consensus of opinion of many of the greatest and most able men who ever lived. For the belief that the Bible is unique is by no means confined to zealous clergymen or enthusiastic missionaries. Famous scientists, statesmen, philosophers, authors, soldiers, and educators share the same view.

Who has not heard of Sir Isaac Newton, the Englishman who discovered the law of gravity and laid the foundations for the great science of physics? Surely his was a master mind. This is what he said of the Bible: "We account the Holy Scriptures to be the most sublime philosophy. There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever."

The author of that great phrase, "Give me liberty or give me death," has justly attained immortality in American history. "The Bible," said Patrick Henry, "is a book worth more than all others printed."

Thomas Huxley, a foremost scientist of the last

century, was not personally an orthodox Christian believer. Yet he paid this tribute to Holy Scripture: "There is in the Bible a vast amount of moral beauty and grandeur. It is written in the noblest and purest English. The Bible has been the Magna Charta of the poor and oppressed. The human race is not in a position to dispense with it."

During our Civil War three men played leading parts. Lincoln was the great emancipator, the savior of the nation. Said he, "I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all the book upon reason that you can and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a better man."

General Lee was the brave leader of the Confederacy. Here is his testimony: "The Bible is a book in comparison with which all others in my eyes are of minor importance; and which in all my perplexities and distresses has never failed to give me light and strength."

General Grant led the Union forces to victory. And he wrote thus: "Hold fast to the Bible as the sheet anchor of your liberties, write its precepts in your heart and practice them in your lives. To the influence of this Book we are indebted for all the progress made in true civilization, and to it we must look as our guide in the future."

In these days of radio, even the schoolboy knows

the fundamentals of electricity. Among the pioneers in this great science was Michael Faraday, who by his discovery of electro-magnetism blazed the way for men like Marconi, Tesla, and Edison. But his wisdom was not confined to scientific investigation, for he asked this searching question, "Why will men go astray when they have this blessed book (the Bible) to guide them?"

These, however, are but a few examples. As a matter of fact, whole books could be filled with tributes which famous men have paid the Bible. Indeed, the testimony of the greatest has been remarkably unanimous in acclaiming this book as supreme. Instead of multiplying these tributes, let us add just one more. A modern example, it is valuable in its powerful warning regarding the neglect of Bible reading. It is from the pen of Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, the largest institution of learning in the world. "The English Bible, a fountain of English literature, is practically stricken from the reading of the American people. I contend that we are not only on the point of impoverishing life and literature by neglect of Bible reading, but we have done so already. It is a present condition, not a future problem. My own feeling is that what has

come to pass can only be described by one word, shameful."

Perhaps the reader is asking himself whether he really knows this book so highly praised by the great of past and present. The following questions are designed to show whether one has a really systematic and comprehensive knowledge of the Bible.

1. Who wrote the Bible?
2. In what languages was the Bible originally written?
3. What is meant by the inspiration of the Bible?
4. Where is Christ first referred to in the Bible?
5. What great promises or covenants did God make with man?
6. Why is there in the Bible so much about the Jews and so little comparatively about other ancient peoples?
7. What is the great theme of Bible prophecy?
8. On what, according to the Bible, does man's spiritual destiny during this age depend?
9. How are the sixty-six books that make up the Bible welded in organic unity?
10. What is the great purpose of the Bible?

These are simple questions. Anyone who knows the Bible should be able to answer them. Yet it is not surprising that some may be puzzled. Bible

study is a big subject, just as complicated, for instance, as the study of English or philosophy or of the sciences. In the first place, it is the study of more than three-score books. Again, it deals with the loftiest and deepest things in the world; not the greatest philosophers can understand all about the Bible. It is not strange, then, that those who have been taught it only once a week in Sunday School and who have learned a little about it at home, should have in mind only a comparatively few fragmentary facts. The topic is really vast. Men can study the Bible for a lifetime and yet not exhaust its contents.

In Bible study, perhaps the first thing to be sought is a connected view of the structure, background, and general content of the book. This is important, for there is great value in the connected view. It may be compared to the steel shell of a skyscraper. With that completed, the contractor adds the brick, the mortar, the stone, and the wood, and finishes the building. So with Bible study. If one can catch a view of Scripture in its structure, if he can see what it is all about, if he can get a comprehensive understanding of its history and of its contents as a whole, he will have something upon which to build. He will have a foundation for profitable and systematic future study, a frame to

which may be added, as they are acquired, the bricks of further knowledge.

But in the building of the skyscraper something else aside from the underlying structure is essential. It is the principles of construction whereby the process of building is carried forward to completion. The contractor cannot clothe the steel girders with bricks, stone, and mortar haphazard. He must follow the laws of building construction. So again with Bible study. Certain guiding principles may be pointed out to show one how to go ahead with his structure of knowledge after he has reared the framework.

To make clear, then, the structure of Scripture, to explain some guiding principles that illuminate Bible study, and to set forth the essential facts about the Bible—that, in brief, is to be our aim in this book.

## *Chapter Two*

### HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

EVERY Christian should be informed regarding the origin, authorship, and transmission of the Bible. Without the Bible there could be no knowledge of the Saviour and consequently no Christianity. Its pages contain the only reliable and contemporary record of the Man whose coming changed history and showed an erring world the way to God. It is the one source-book of the eternal reality—Christ, the Redeemer of lost souls. Therefore, its reliability as evidenced by the striking story of its origin and transmission through the centuries is of vital importance.

Who wrote the Bible? The answer is necessarily twofold. From the divine point of view, the Spirit of God is the author, for He, as we shall later see,[1] inspired all of Scripture. In this sense the Bible, despite the various men used of God for its production, is a book of single authorship—a fact to which its essential unity and coherence of structure will be

[1] Chapter III.

seen to bear unmistakable witness. But from the human point of view, the Bible had many authors; the actual work of composition was done by about two score men. Some of them are known to us, some are hidden in obscurity, identified only by their names, and of some all record, even that of their names, has passed. Certain Bible authors, such as Moses, David, Solomon, Paul, and John are world-famous, and had great prominence in their own day. Others, like Obadiah or Malachi, have remained comparatively obscure.

Join together these facts of divine control and a wide group of authors, and you have the truth as to the origin of the Bible. It had one, yet many writers. It is of single yet composite authorship. Men wrote it, but they did so only under the guidance of the Almighty. They were but His instruments. The ruling hand, the mind that originated the sublime plan of the book, the Spirit that caused humble men to record words and sentences of imperishable worth—these were all of God. In short, the Bible is God's way of expressing Himself *through* humanity *to* humanity. Consequently, the authorship is twofold. Men were but the spokesmen; God was the speaker.

The actual process of writing extended over a period of about 1,600 years. The first author of

whom we have any exact knowledge was Moses, who lived about 1,500 years before Christ. Although certain higher critical scholars deny this fact, tradition and sound research still warrant the belief that Moses wrote the Pentateuch.[2] Another great Old Testament author was David, many of the Psalms being ascribed to him. He lived about 1000 B.C. Solomon, his son, wrote Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, and compiled Proverbs. Of great importance were the prophets whose writings take their names from their authors. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Jeremiah, and their fellows were men of high literary gifts. A good portion of the Old Testament books are anonymous—that is, we can do no more than conjecture or make careful guesses according to the facts at our disposal as to who wrote them. Such are Judges, Ruth, Esther, and the historical books like Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

The New Testament presents fewer questions of authorship. Paul very evidently wrote those Epistles with which his name is associated. So with Peter, James, and John. The four Gospels are plainly identified with their authors, although there is in certain modern circles an unsuccessful attempt to dissociate the Gospel of John from the Apostle John. But, as

[2] "Pentateuch" is a term applied to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy—the first five books of the Bible.

a matter of fact, about the only New Testament book of uncertain authorship is Hebrews, and there is some evidence for connecting this with Paul.

Of course, the fact that some portions of the Bible are by unknown authors has little bearing upon its authenticity or authority. On the other hand, important issues may often hang upon the authorship of certain books. Thus the date and authorship of Daniel or the Pentateuch occupy a strategic position in the Old Testament, while the authorship and date of the Gospel of John is of the most vital concern to the faith. Critical scholars have waged many a conflict over these questions, but the assured results have always tended to confirm rather than to tear down the authority of the Bible. It is a significant fact that God seems to have placed at our disposal evidence regarding the authorship of the very books that have so fiercely been attacked because of their strategic position, while in the cases of those books that are anonymous, the importance of knowing these things seems secondary.

Having spoken of authors, we are next concerned with the languages in which these men wrote. In general, the Old Testament, according to the most ancient manuscripts which we possess, was almost entirely written in Hebrew, only a very few small portions of Daniel and Ezra having been composed

in Aramaic, the language of ancient Babylon. Whether such a foreign tongue as this was used more frequently in the original documents we do not know, but there is no doubt that in the main the Old Testament writers used Hebrew, the language of God's chosen people. As for the New Testament, it seems to have been written exclusively in Greek, the world tongue at the time of Christ.

It is to some a startling fact that there is not in the known possession of any library, church or individual a single original manuscript of the Bible. The autographs of the inspired writers seem all to have been lost. This is a circumstance that has been seized upon by detractors from the divine authority of Scripture and that has caused believers much unnecessary concern. But that there are extant no original manuscripts of the Bible is by no means strange. Indeed, it is but what would be expected of a book so ancient. In the case of no other work of similar age have we any original manuscript. Consequently, if for this reason one is to doubt Scripture, he must at the same time doubt all of the classics. And that would be absurd.

As a matter of fact, it is not difficult to imagine a reason for the disappearance of the original sacred writings. Knowledge of human nature leads us to believe that had their whereabouts continued to be

known they might only too easily have become objects first of veneration and then of worship. The well-known tendency of the Roman Catholic Church to accord superstitious reverence to all sorts of relics of the saints and apostles shows what might have happened in the case of the Bible. In fact, the Old Testament gives us an example of this, for it is recorded that the Jews kept the brazen serpent that Moses set up in the wilderness and that they finally worshiped it until the good king Hezekiah[3] destroyed it. But this could never be the case with the Bible. It is unthinkable that God would permit His word to become the object of idolatrous worship. Consequently, one can almost discern a divine providence behind the loss of the original manuscripts.

But, despite the plain fact that the classics have also in their originals disappeared, there is a persistent effort among the ignorant or unscrupulous enemies of the Church to tear down faith in the authenticity of the text of Scripture. Brief consideration will show not only the lack of force, but also the retroactive nature of their arguments. No reputable critic or scholar would assert that the writings of Horace, Tacitus, Catullus, Aristotle, Herodotus, or Thucydides—to mention but a few of the outstanding authors of antiquity—are spurious

[3] II Kings 18:4.

or in general unauthentic. The works of these men rest upon a basis too secure to admit of such a charge. The educated world accepts them without question. It is accordingly plain that if we can show the Bible to depend upon as solid a textual basis as the classics, its general authenticity will have been established beyond a reasonable doubt. As a matter of fact we can do not only this, but also a good deal more besides.

The first fact to be noticed in regard to the classics has already been stated. The original manuscripts, as in the case of the Bible, are not extant. In this respect, the two kinds of ancient writings—sacred and secular—are on a level.

The second fact concerns what we shall call the interval of silence—that is, the length of time which elapsed between the actual composition and the date of the earliest extant manuscript of a given ancient work of literature. This interval of silence for the classics is astonishingly wide. For instance, the first known manuscripts of the works of Herodotus or Thucydides date no less than 1,500 years from the time of these famous Greek historians. The *Ethics,* one of the chief works of the great philosopher Aristotle, does not appear in manuscript until about 1,400 years from the time of its writing. With the Latin authors the interval of silence is necessarily

somewhat smaller, for Roman literature followed that of Greece. Notwithstanding, 750 years separate the earliest extant manuscript of Tacitus from the author's lifetime; even then, according to Latin scholars, most of the text of this famous historian is based upon the authority of a single copy. Horace's *Odes* are not found in any manuscript earlier than 900 years after his death, the work of Catullus reaches us only through a few manuscripts made 1,450 years after he lived, and no single manuscript has the entire text of Lucian, one of the most influential writers of all antiquity. As a matter of fact, this scarcity of complete manuscripts holds true for many of the classics; in certain cases even, the great mass of the work of an author has entirely disappeared and only a few disjointed fragments remain, as in the poems of Sappho.

Judging from these examples, and they are representative, these facts are evident: in the case of the classics the intervals of silence are very great; full copies of classic writings are comparatively scarce or even entirely lacking. To these should be added a further fact. As manuscripts were copied and recopied, errors were bound to creep in. Before the invention of printing, books could be duplicated only by hand, scribes being employed for the purpose. Naturally enough, these scribes made mis-

takes which in another copying were perpetuated and perhaps added to, and thus serious corruption of the text resulted. Yet such is the accuracy of scholarship in this field that many of these errors have been corrected, the manuscripts pieced together and completed, despite fragmentary sources, and the texts of the ancient authors reconstructed with remarkable accuracy in a form acceptable to educated men.

Consider now the Bible. Belief in its trustworthiness is greatly strengthened by the knowledge that for it the interval of silence is much less than for the classics in general, that the number of ancient sacred manuscripts is much larger than for the classics, and that the Bible was copied with a scrupulous exactitude rarely, if ever, equaled in the case of secular books.

As we have seen, the interval of silence for the classics averages about 1,000 years. But for the Bible it is much smaller, being for the New Testament only about 250 years. Furthermore, the Bible stands alone in the continuity of its early history. The centuries of silence which confront us in the case of the classics are no problem for the student of Scripture. Through manuscript, translation, commentary, and ancient citation, scholars can trace

a good portion of the Bible almost to the time of its writing.

In regard to care of copying, the Bible has again had special advantages. To the ancient scribes it was the Book of Life, and they sought perfection in the toil of copying it word for word. Being the foundation of their faith, upon it were based all their hopes for eternity. They brought to their task redoubled care and regarded the smallest error with actual horror. The Greek copyists recorded as a safeguard the number of verses written. As for the Hebrew scribes, tradition tells us that they corrected not only the verses, but also individual words and letters, picking out the center of the portion to be copied and marking the middle letter of the whole as a sort of keystone. If they detected the smallest error, even in a single letter, it was their bounden duty to destroy at once the page thus marred. Ceremonial restrictions such as the speaking aloud of each letter before writing, the use of parchment made only from the skins of "clean" animals, and the reverent wiping of the pen before inscribing the divine name gave the scribes an added respect for their task. On completion, their work was subjected to elaborate scrutiny, and if only one wrong letter were discovered, the whole copy was cast aside. Much the same may be said for the

Christian copyists of the early centuries. They too were passionately zealous for accuracy. Moreover, their work had the added check of frequent revision during the first centuries; scholars like Jerome, Eusebius, and Augustine compared the manuscripts, detected errors, and thus helped prevent corruption of the text.

But we have gone far enough to show the Bible to be not only equal but even far superior to the classics in its textual foundation. One cannot well doubt the one without doubting the other; and since the classics are universally accepted, the intelligent person, be he believer or otherwise, must accord the Bible equal respect.

Of course, it would be a perversion of fact to hold that, because of its remarkable textual history, the Bible, as we have it now, is entirely without error. Despite the great care exercised in its copying, a few corruptions have persisted. Yet the bulk of these are explainable as errors of the scribes and thus are easily corrected. They have little bearing on the integrity of the book as a whole, and they are, moreover, surprisingly few. In fact, it has been estimated that variations of any importance in the text of the New Testament amount to less than one-thousandth of the whole.

Passing now from the text and its transmission,

we come to the question of the recognition of the individual books as Scripture. How, for instance, did the sixty-six books of our English Bible come to be regarded as the Word of God? The term which covers this question is an interesting one. It is the word "canon." Originally it meant in the Greek "a cane," "a reed," or "a carpenter's rod." Hence, it was figuratively used in the sense of "a testing rule" or "measure" in ethics, art, or literature, and so came to be applied to Scripture. In its Biblical use it has chiefly a passive sense. The canonical books are those which have been measured by a certain rule and as a result have been included in the Bible. In an active sense, the word means that the canonical books are a guide for the church and for the individual.

But there is much more to this question of the canon than the mere technical meaning of the word. The interesting point is the origin of the canon—that is, when and how the Old and the New Testament came to be regarded as fixed collections of unique and authoritative books.

Let us first turn our attention to the Old Testament. Among the earliest of the authoritative writings were the ten commandments, graven, according to Exodus,[4] on the tables of stone. Next

[4] Exodus 24: 12.

were the books of Moses, followed by Joshua's writings. Then came probably the historical records and poetical books, and then the prophets. Much of these writings was early considered inspired and authoritative, so that by the time of Ezra [5] we find the entire Pentateuch circulated and classed as a separate portion of sacred literature. Finally came the division of the Old Testament into the Law (*i.e.,* the Pentateuch), the Prophets (*i.e.,* Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets), and the Writings (*i.e.,* Esther, Ruth, Lamentations, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Nehemiah, Ezra, Chronicles, and Daniel). At the time of Christ this was the accepted division and had been for over a century, if not much longer. Indeed, there is good reason to credit the tradition that Ezra, back in the time of Artaxerxes, more than four centuries before Christ, collected the sacred books into these fixed groups. This, whenever done, was the closing of the Old Testament canon. In the years following Ezra the canon was but confirmed; the persecution by Antiochus (B.C. 168), who made possession of a sacred book a capital crime, only served to center zealous faith in Scripture.

[5] *c.* 450 B.C. However, the exact order in which the Old Testament books were written is not certainly known.

This, very briefly, is the story of the Old Testament canon. In it certain facts stand out. First, individual books were regarded as authoritative Scripture long *before* the canon was closed. Second, the little that we know of the making of the Old Testament canon shows it to have been a long selective process whereby later books which did not carry the right of authoritative Scripture must have been rejected. Such were the apocrypha, like the books of Maccabees, Tobit, and Baruch, most of which date from the first few centuries before Christ. Third, persecution had a definite effect in confirming the canon and endearing the people to the authoritative books.

For the New Testament much the same is true. Very early the Gospels were accepted as authoritative, and shortly thereafter the unique authority of the apostolic writings, such as the Epistles and the Acts, was admitted. These books at an early time were known as "the Gospel" and "the Apostle," were read in churches, and took their place with the Old Testament as Scripture. So the matter remained until about 140 A.D., when the church began its struggle with enemies within and enemies without. The necessity for combating such heretics as the Gnostics naturally forced the early Christians not only to fall back upon their accepted books, but also

to inquire into their authenticity. And the persecutions of Rome could not but infuse the Scriptures with new meaning and emphasize their divine character as a refuge and source of help in time of trouble. By 225 A.D. the principle of a New Testament of equal authority with the Old seems to have been firmly established. In the fourth century the move toward uniformity in the New Testament canon was completed. There was considerable discussion about II Peter, II and III John, James, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation, the other books being universally accepted. Finally, however, in 367 A.D., Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, decreed that the New Testament canon consist of the twenty-seven books now accepted. Thus the discussion regarding the apostolic books was settled. The Council of Carthage acted similarly in 397 A.D., and so the New Testament canon was fixed. The process was again progressive and selective; many New Testament apocrypha, or unauthentic books, were gradually ruled out. The chief standard set up as a test of the canonical character of a New Testament book was what is known as *apostolicity*—whether or not the book emanated from an apostle or had behind it any real apostolic authority.

Such, then, is the historical basis of the canon. The question might well be asked as to the validity

of these processes. What guarantee have we that books of Scriptural rank were not rejected? What evidence is there that inspired books were not kept from the canon? The question is easily answered. An impartial examination of the apocrypha[6] or uncanonical books is ample to convince the investigator that no mistake was made. These writings are generally so far below the level of true Scripture that their omission from the canon is fully vindicated. But one might say that it seems strange that God would commit the accrediting of His book to such seemingly haphazard processes as the formation of the Old and New Testament canons. The fact is that the canon does not accredit Scripture, but simply collects or accepts what is *already accredited* and considered as inspired and authoritative. It has been truly said that the Bible is not an authorized collection of books, but a collection of authorized books. Nevertheless, it is far from fanciful to believe that God, who inspired the authors of the canonical books, surely would not leave without guidance

[6] Recent advertising has featured *The Lost Books of the Bible,* the volume in question being a collection of apocryphal writings. One should note that the title given this collection is a misnomer of the worst sort. Never having had a place in the canon, the apocrypha were not at any time "books of the Bible." Neither have they been "lost," for scholars have continuously been acquainted with their contents. The implications of this title are misleading and grossly unfair to real Scripture.

those who had a leading part in a matter of such vital importance as the formation of the canon. It seems clearly evident that the process was more than chance, and that God supervised it, mindful of the integrity of His Word.

So much for historical facts. Essential as they are as "a reason for the hope" that is in us, still they are not the cause of that hope. As Martin Luther wisely observed, there is for us of a later day another test of canonicity. According to his belief, those books are canonical which contain Christ and which thus bear their witness to the spirit of him who reads. The test is a good one. After all, in a practical sense each Christian has his own canon of books that speak to his spirit of Christ. Of course, the truth of the matter is that *all* the authorized books have this power, and as one grows in knowledge of the Bible he discovers Christ in every part of it. All of the Bible, either in type, in prophecy, or in direct statement contains Christ, and it devolves upon the Christian to discern Him therein.[7]

No book has ever been so widely circulated over so long a period of years as the Bible. Shortly after the formation of the Hebrew canon, the Old Testament was translated into Greek, while early in the Christian era both Old and New Testaments found

[7] John 5:39.

their way into Latin. Oddly enough Scripture has been chiefly circulated in languages other than Hebrew and Greek. Translations in great number have in an unbroken flow continued to be made down through the ages, until at present we have the Bible in over five hundred fifty separate dialects and languages. It is doubtful whether there is a tongue known to civilized man into which the Bible has not been translated. Indeed, scores of obscure dialects in Africa and the Orient have first been reduced to writing through the labors of missionaries in translating Scripture.

The first of the long line of translations was that of the Old Testament into Greek. From the tradition which says that it was made by seventy-two scholars of Alexandria, this translation is known as the Septuagint, after the Latin word meaning "seventy." It was made in the interval between 285 and 130 B.C. Naturally the Septuagint is of great value to scholars for comparison with the Hebrew Old Testament text.

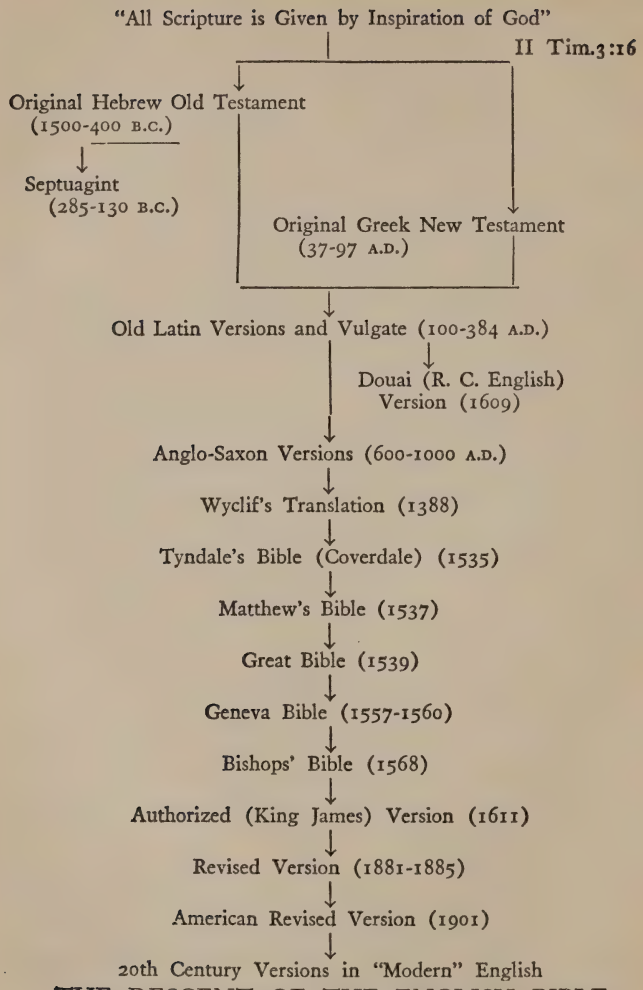
Because of the supremacy of the Roman Empire and the growing world use of its language, translations of the Bible into Latin were inevitable. The first of these seems to have been made early, for by the beginning of the third century A.D. there were a number of Latin versions of the New Testament.

By the fourth century their number was so great and they differed in so many details that Pope Damasus requested Jerome to undertake a revision with a view to a new and improved Latin Bible. The result of Jerome's labors was published about 384 A.D. and was adopted by the Church. It has had many revisions, and has long been the standard, Roman Catholic version, being known as the Vulgate, from the Latin term which means "commonly used."

Aside from these two great ancient translations, we know that the Bible early found its way into other tongues. Back in the fourth century a Teutonic bishop named Ulfilas translated portions of the Scriptures into Gothic. As old as 200 A.D. is the version in such a "dead" language as Coptic, while the Ethiopian and Anglo-Saxon translations are also of great antiquity.

But as English-speaking Christians and heirs to the finest of all translations, we are naturally more interested in those versions which we read. The accompanying diagram (page 28) will show at a glance their descent.

It is at once evident that the standard English versions are the result of a long process of literary evolution. Beginning the line were the Anglo-Saxon translations. At first fragmentary and never, ac-




THE DESCENT OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

cording to existing copies, entirely complete, the first of these was made soon after the missionary Augustine arrived in England in 596 A.D. These earliest Old English translations were based upon the various Latin renderings. Portions of a good many of them have been found, covering the period from about 600 to 1000 A.D. Among the writers who produced them were the poet Cædmon, the Venerable Bede, most famous scholar of Anglo-Saxon England, and the noted Ælfric. Even such a leading figure of his age as King Alfred is reported to have been actively interested in the translation of Scripture into Old English. From the very first, then, the people of Britain exhibited an unusual interest in rendering the Word of God in their own tongue.

The successor of the Anglo-Saxon versions and the great mediæval offshoot of the Vulgate was the translation of John Wyclif, which appeared first only as a New Testament in 1378 and later in 1388 was complete, thanks to the help of Purvey, Wyclif's co-worker. Wyclif's Bible was in the middle English of the time, the speech of the common people. From the literary point of view it was a remarkable rendering, and set the standard for English prose. Its production was bitterly opposed by ecclesiastical authority.

During the years intervening between the times of Wyclif and Tyndale, the English language changed greatly, and the Church grew more and more hostile to vernacular translations of Scripture. The work of William Tyndale and his followers is one of the heroic pages in all history. A persecuted exile, he published his English New Testament in 1525 in Germany and smuggled copies into England. In 1530 he published an English Pentateuch, and in 1536 he was martyred by strangling and fire. His work, however, was carried to completion in 1535 by a certain Miles Coverdale. What Tyndale accomplished can hardly be overestimated. Living at a time when religious bigotry burned at white heat, he achieved the great goal of making Scripture in the common tongue accessible to all his countrymen. So outstanding was his literary genius that his translation is the chief influence upon the great King James, or Authorized, Version.

In rapid succession, now that Tyndale had dared to take the first step, many English renderings appeared. For the most part they bear a close relation to the work of Tyndale. That known as Matthew's Bible (really the work of one of Tyndale's companions) is of interest because its translator, John Rogers, perished at the stake. The Geneva Bible was made under John Calvin's supervision by a group

of exiles in Switzerland. With the Bishops' Bible [8] it took high rank because of its literary merit, and it found a wide use.

The climax to these years of labor was the Authorized Version, published and translated in 1611 by a committee of forty-seven scholars who met at the suggestion of King James I. In beauty of diction and fidelity to the spirit (though not always to the letter) of the original, it is the acknowledged leader of all English translations. The greatest monument of English prose, it is without equal in our entire literature. Even now, after more than three hundred years, it remains by far the most widely used version in the language, and it is safe to say that it will never lose this place.

For two hundred seventy years the Authorized Version held unchallenged sway among English-speaking peoples. Then, from 1881 to 1885, there met in Great Britain a group of English and American scholars. The result of their careful work was the Revised Version, in which many of the inaccuracies in the Authorized Version are, in the light of later research, corrected and obsolete words modernized. Again, in 1901, the American members of the Revision Committee published a translation containing some of the suggestions made by them in

[8] A version sanctioned by the Anglican bishops of the time.

England, but not incorporated in the 1885 edition. This American Standard Version is noteworthy for the fact that, throughout the Old Testament, "Jehovah" is consistently used instead of "Lord."

Of late, there have been a number of interesting attempts to put the Bible into modern speech. Among them the translations of Weymouth and Moffatt are perhaps best known. That of Moffatt is more of a paraphrase than an exact translation, and, enlightening as it is, shows perhaps an unfortunate critical bias. Weymouth's New Testament is undoubtedly the best of the modern versions. But in none of these translations has a general improvement been made upon the Authorized Version. The gain, because of an occasional replacement of obsolete phrases, has been more than offset by a loss in dignity and beauty of expression. Like the Revised Versions, the translations in modern speech may fill a place as works of reference, but they can never supersede the great rendering of 1611.

## *Chapter Three*

### THE MEANING OF INSPIRATION

Is THE Bible inspired in a unique way, or is it merely inspired in the same manner as the productions of literary genius? Is it inspired in a way that makes it throughout free from error, or is it just as liable to err as any other ancient work? These are questions of fundamental importance. Whoever would give the Bible honest consideration must face them. In fact, until one arrives at a conclusion regarding this matter of inspiration, he can hardly attain a settled view of Scripture.

The word "inspiration" is of Latin origin. Literally it means "breathed in." The book that is in this sense inspired is one into which something of another spirit or mind has been breathed; in other words, its author has been overshadowed by a power *outside* himself. Considered in this light, but one book can make a valid claim to inspiration. That book, of course, is the Bible. And as a matter of fact, the Bible is the only book which continuously through ages has been accepted by enlightened men

as thus inspired. Of course, back in ancient times poets were thought of as inspired, the theory of "furor poeticus," as it was called, being that the poet was possessed in a time of frenzy by a divine spirit. The theory, however, has long since been discarded, and is remembered only as one of the curiosities of ancient literary criticism. Only in the case of the Bible has belief in a supernatural type of inspiration persisted.

We might well pause to ask why this belief has persisted in the case of the Bible alone. Is it merely a deep-rooted superstition, tenacious in its hold on the popular mind and reluctant to disappear? Hardly, for had such been the case it could not have survived the penetrative scrutiny of so many scholarly minds. On the contrary, the answer is that the Scriptures are of such a unique character, their influence has been so tremendous, and their message so remarkable that men have found it impossible to account for them as the product of the human intellect unaided by a higher power. The plan of salvation, the searching revelation of the heart of man, the sure glances into the future, the matchless words and the mighty acts of Christ—all these elements of the Biblical message are so stamped with divinity that humanity well hesitates to claim their origin.

The highest reaches of human genius cannot account for them.

But there is another reason why the Bible has so consistently been thought of as inspired. It explicitly *claims* inspiration, and in so doing is in a class apart. We read, for instance, in Paul's second letter to his friend Timothy this statement, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." [1] Peter in his second epistle makes a similar assertion.[2] Christ Himself said, as John records in his Gospel, that "the Scripture cannot be broken." [3] Over and over in the Old Testament we find expressions like "Thus saith the Lord," "God spake," "The Lord testified, saying," and "The Lord hath spoken it." Indeed, there are 1,300 of these expressions in the prophets alone, and the entire Old Testament contains a total of 2,400 such phrases definitely attributing to God the guiding oversight and inspiration of Scripture. It is clear, therefore, that whatever else may be said of inspiration, the fact that the Bible itself claims to be inspired is undeniable.

This important claim is perhaps most definitely set forth by Paul and Peter in the passages just cited. Examining Paul's words in II Timothy,[4] we

[1] II Timothy 3:16. [2] II Peter 1:21. [3] John 10:35.

[4] "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." II Timothy 3:16.

see that he is speaking in very explicit terms. Nothing could be more definite than his phrase, "all Scripture." Literally it is "every Scripture." Plainly enough Paul did not have in mind any theory of partial inspiration. Moreover, where our English version reads "given by inspiration of God," the Greek has but one word, Θεόπνευστος, which means "God-breathed," an accurate manner indeed of stating the fact of inspiration. Again, Paul contends that "all Scripture" is not only "profitable," but that it is "profitable" for certain uses so widely different as "doctrine" and "reproof." Summing up, we find, therefore, that according to Paul the whole of Scripture [5] is inspired, or "God-breathed," and that *every* portion of it has its particular use.

Now the passage in II Peter brings still further light. To be sure, it mentions only one section of Scripture—*i.e.,* prophecy. However, its treatment of the mode of inspiration is direct and illuminating. "For," says Peter, "the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." [6] In other words, in the giving of prophecy the will of man was supplanted, and the writing did not result from human desire alone. It sprang, on the contrary, not

[5] Of course, the Scripture of St. Paul was the Old Testament; the New Testament was at his time in the course of composition.
[6] II Peter 1:21.

from ordinary men but from "holy men of God" who spoke under the express guidance of Deity, for the Greek literally says, "as they were *borne-along* by the Holy Spirit." We see, consequently, that inspiration was a matter of two factors—God and man. It was the former who was dominant; in the case of prophecy at least, even the human will was set aside, and the Spirit of God controlled and bore along the writer.

We now begin to see something of the scope and mode of inspiration. Adding to these facts Christ's own statement in the tenth chapter of John to the effect that "the Scripture cannot be broken," we perceive the implications of the view of inspiration set forth by Paul and Peter. What did Christ mean by "the Scripture cannot be broken"? Of course, He was referring in particular to the eighty-second Psalm, although the context leads us to believe that He had in mind Scripture as a whole. He made the statement at a time of crisis, when, in fact, His very life was in danger. Speaking to the Jews in the temple at Jerusalem the winter before His death, He finally answered their insolent demand—"How long makest thou us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly"—by making a stupendous claim. "I and my Father," said He, "are one."[7] With that the

[7] John 10:24-30.

Jews took up stones to put Him to death, charging that in claiming to be God, He was guilty of blasphemy. It was truly a crisis. The Jews were thirsting for His blood. They seized upon this fresh assertion of His Deity as additional evidence that He was indeed a blasphemer worthy of death. At such critical times Christ found His strongest defense in Scripture. When He was tempted of the Devil, He had stood fast behind God's Word.[8] And so here He again took refuge in the Old Testament. To the charge that He made Himself God He replied with the consummate mastery of Scripture that was His alone, by quoting the words of Psalm 82, "Ye are gods."[9] "If," He argued, "He [God] called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken; say ye of Him [*i.e.,* Christ], whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"[10] The argument was impregnable. In its center was that phrase, "the Scripture cannot be broken," an absolute guarantee that the Word of God is a bulwark of truth. Silenced, His enemies had no recourse other than continued violence, but "He escaped out of their hands," for His earthly ministry was not complete and the time of His death had not yet come.

[8] Matthew 4:4, 7, 10. [9] Verse 6. [10] John 10:35, 36.

The incident is characteristic of Christ's handling of Scripture. For Him the written Word was the supreme authority, infallible and not to be "broken." As such it was used by Him in His public ministry with the utmost assurance. As such it was employed by the apostles, and as such it has been accepted by the great succession of martyrs, saints, and chosen servants of the Lord throughout the centuries.

But Christ's statement that "the Scripture cannot be broken," besides giving us an insight into what He thought of the Old Testament, brings us face to face with a great and critical issue, the question as to whether or not Scripture *can* be broken. In other words, is the Bible inerrant? Is it, like other books, liable to mistake, or is it absolutely without mistake? This phase of our theme draws us to the question of verbal inspiration and thus leads very close to the center of the problem.

Although the tradition of the Christian church is on the side of verbal inspiration, modern times are witnessing a vigorous assault upon this view of the Scriptures. "No enlightened person," we are told, "can any longer hold to the verbal inerrancy of the Bible. Scientific and Biblical research have forever relegated this view to the scrap-heap of outworn ideas. To be sure, the Bible is inspired, but so are the works of Tennyson, Browning, and other

great writers. While the Bible admittedly contains the highest spiritual teaching known to man, much of it is also dross. While it contains God's Word, revelation is by no means complete in it. The poets, the scientists, and the philosophers also have a divine message, and, though there may be a difference, it is a difference of degree, not of kind. To believe, therefore, that every word of the Bible is inspired and that the Bible stands without error as God's revelation to man is for the modern mind simply impossible."

This, in brief, is a picture of an attitude toward the inspiration of the Bible which these days is very common. In considering this attitude, let us note, first of all, that the question is one of fact, not of opinion. If the facts fortify the view that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God, the question, incredible as it may seem, is settled. No amount of conjecture, opinion, or argument can change the verdict.

But just what is meant by verbal[11] inspiration? Exact understanding of the term is an essential basis for a discussion of this vital nature. As a definition, we may hazard the following: The theory of verbal inspiration holds that the original documents of the

[11] Sometimes the term "plenary inspiration" is used to describe a view similar to that which we are here discussing as verbal inspiration.

Bible were written by men who, though permitted the exercise of their own personality and literary talent, yet wrote under the control and guidance of the Spirit of God, the result being in every word of the original documents a perfect and errorless recording of the exact revelation which God desired to give to man.—This, we believe, is a fair statement of the verbal theory. It settles on the face of it many of the misrepresentations so commonly made of this view.

Unfortunately, skepticism exhibits a persistent tendency to caricature the intellectual position of those who accept the Bible as a divinely inspired book. When verbal inspiration is mentioned, the skeptical immediately set up a "straw man" portraying the beliefs of those who hold to a view which seems to them so outrageously behind the times. This popular misconception of verbal inspiration runs along some such lines as this: "The authors of the Bible were little better than human dictaphones recording mechanically the words of the divine writer. Thus the individuality of the writer was lost, his function being but that of parrot-like reproduction. As for the Bible which we now have, it is entirely free from error, even the punctuation having been transmitted unchanged." Such a view, accord-

ing to the skeptical, is intellectually impossible and can be held only by the most ignorant.

To this we agree. However, the point is that "such a view" is certainly not common, even among the most ardent defenders of Scripture. And among real Bible scholars it is simply nonexistent. No, verbal inspiration does not deny the writer his personality, nor does it set up the translations as infallible. It does, however, insist on the absolute verbal inerrancy of the *original* writings, and it does claim that God definitely controlled His chosen human instruments in such a way that they recorded His message in perfect harmony with His will.

Yet even this view is the cause of violent objections. The difficulty seems in the first place to lie in the claim that every word is inspired. "Why," runs the question, "believe in the inspiration of every word? The thoughts are inspired. The matter of correctness of mere words is a minor concern." The reply to this is obvious. Words are essential to thought, for only in words can intelligible ideas be expressed. Consequently, in the last analysis the words themselves *must* be inspired, for they are the essential medium for the thought. The fact is self-evident. Nevertheless, it is also borne out in a striking way by the Bible itself.

We have already spoken of Christ's use of Scrip-

ture. We shall now quote Him further to emphasize the importance He assigned to the exact words and even letters of the Bible. In that searching exposition of Christian ethics, the Sermon on the Mount, He definitely asserts not only the verbal inspiration but also the verbal indestructibility of Scripture. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled." [12] When we consider that the "jot" means the "yod," which is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the "tittle" stands for the "horn," a tiny projection of the base line on certain letters, we see to what an extent Christ guarantees the indestructibility of the text.

As a matter of fact, Christ continually used Scripture as though its very words are inspired. For example, when the Sadducees questioned Him about the resurrection, He proved this doctrine by a reference to the Old Testament in which the whole force of His argument hinged on the present tense of the verb "to be." "But as touching the resurrection of the dead," He reasoned, "have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and

[12] Matthew 5: 17, 18.

the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." [13] It is very clear that Christ here centers His argument on the present tense, "am."

Turning for a moment from Christ to His apostle, Paul, we find this greatest of Christian servants speaking in I Corinthians 2: 13 of *words* "which the Holy Ghost teacheth." This certainly is a clear reference to verbal inspiration. And in his use of Scripture Paul bears out this view. In Galatians 3: 16, following the example of his Master, "he employs," as Dr. James M. Gray has put it, "not merely a single word, but a single letter (inflection) of a word as the basis of an argument for a great doctrine. The blessing of justification which Abraham received has become that of the believer in Jesus Christ. 'Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.'" [14] Here the whole point rests upon the singular noun *σπέρματι* rather than the plural noun *σπέρμασιν*.

The significance of passages like the above has been summarized by Dr. Arthur T. Pierson in the following notable paragraph: "There are, with regard to this question of verbal inspiration, or the oversight of the very words of Scripture, five im-

[13] Matthew 22: 31, 32.
[14] *The Fundamentals,* Vol. II.

portant significant passages in the Word of God: Hebrews 12:27; Galatians 4:9; John 8:58; John 10:34-36; Galatians 3:16. If these passages are examined it will be seen that in the first instance the argument turns on *one phrase,* 'yet once more.' In the second, on the *passive voice* rather than the *active voice* of the verb. In the third, on the *present* rather than the *past* tense. In the fourth, on the inviolability of a single *word;* and in the fifth, on the retention of the singular number of a noun, rather than the plural. Taking the five passages together, they teach us that, to alter or omit a phrase, change the voice or mood or tense of a verb, change a single word or even the number of a noun, is to break the Scriptures; and if this does not come close to verbal inspiration, then I am no judge." [15]

But to return to Jesus Christ as an authority for a high view of inspiration, His use of Scripture when He was tempted in the wilderness affords an impregnable argument. Here, as Satan tempts Him, we find Him three times resorting to the Pentateuch for His answers to the onslaughts of the enemy.[16] Adolphe Monod [17] has expressed admirably the significance of Christ's use of Scripture at this critical time.

[15] Cf. *And God Spake These Words;* Thomas, pp. 91, 92.
[16] Matthew 4:4, 7, 10.
[17] Cf. *The Fundamentals,* Vol. II, p. 31.

"What!" writes Monod, "Jesus Christ, the Law of heaven and earth, calling to His aid in that solemn moment Moses His servant? He who speaks from heaven fortifying Himself against the temptations of hell by the word of him who spake from earth? How can we explain that spiritual mystery, that wonderful reversing of the order of things, if for Jesus the words of Moses were not the words of God rather than those of men? How shall we explain it if Jesus were not fully aware that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost?"

However, let us pass from particular instances, of which incidentally many more could be adduced, to the fundamental logic of the case. Granted that God gave man a written revelation, it is inconceivable that He would give him an imperfect revelation. Any true conception of God must acknowledge His perfection. The Almighty is infinitely and perfectly good, just, merciful, and true, to name but a few of His attributes. This being the case, we cannot escape the conclusion that His Word must be entirely true and free from error. Otherwise, the very nature of God in respect to His absolute truth would be violated.[18] Such in brief is the argument

[18] It is not surprising, therefore, that we find Christ saying in the great prayer recorded in John 17, "Thy word is truth."

for the absolute verbal inerrancy of the original documents of Scripture.

"But," one may say, "no translation of the Bible is without error. Even the best versions do not agree, and our oldest manuscripts have many points of difference. What, then, is the sense of insisting upon the inerrancy of the original documents? If God wanted us to have a Bible free even from minor errors, He would have performed a special miracle to transmit it unchanged." The objection is clever but superficial. Consider, for instance, Jesus Christ Himself. All Christians regard Him as perfect in character. Yet His character has never been completely and perfectly reproduced for us. The Gospel records, inspired and correct though they are, must necessarily be incomplete, for they contain a picture of Christ comprehensible to the human mind, and Christ's personality far transcends the compass of the human mind. Nevertheless, we must accept His perfection which we have not seen to receive Him as our divine Saviour. And if this be true of the incarnate Word, it is true also of the written Word. The Bible could not be the actual Word of God, were it not in its original state entirely free from error. Else, as we have pointed out, we should be faced with the impossibility of a God perfect in truth giving an untruthful revelation.

The story is told[19] of a certain skeptical thinker who was scoffing at the inspiration of the original Bible manuscripts as a point of no consequence. It was, he said, of small moment whether a pair of trousers were originally perfect if they were now torn. To this, the late Dr. David James Burrell, of the Marble Collegiate Church of New York, is said to have replied that it might be a matter of small consequence to the wearer of the trousers, but the tailor who made them would prefer to have it understood that they did not leave his shop that way. And then he added that if the Most High must train among the knights of the shears, He might at least be regarded as the best of the guild, and One who drops no stitches and sends out no imperfect work!

"Still," continues the skeptic, "consider the mistakes of Scripture. Do they not overthrow belief in verbal inspiration?" And indeed we must admit that, could the alleged discrepancies, contradictions, and historical mistakes of the Bible be generally maintained, verbal inspiration would receive a severe blow. Let us, however, seek the facts.

Many seeming discrepancies are easily explainable as scribal errors. For instance, in the process of copying the text, the scribe despite his care

[19] Dr. James M. Gray in *The Fundamentals,* Vol. II.

dropped out or added a letter or a word.[20] Thus an error crept in. Such a mistake, of course, has no bearing on the perfection of the originals. Again, many contradictions, when studied closely, are found to be but surface contradictions. Fair consideration reconciles the opposing facts.

Much used to be made of the conflict between the Bible narratives and the supposed facts of science and history. However, archeological research is proceeding at such a pace that critics are becoming increasingly wary of arbitrarily discarding even the most ancient Old Testament stories. A striking example of what is happening in this sphere is the research being conducted in Mesopotamia by the University of Pennsylvania and the British Museum. Here the very Ur of the Chaldees of Abraham has been unearthed. No longer can Abraham be regarded as a tribal myth or a primitive sheik. Rather is it clear that he lived in a high state of civilization. But even more striking is the unearthing of great beds of silt, eight feet deep, covering the land of Mesopotamia, and the finding underneath the silt of remains of the most ancient civilization yet known. This, according to Professor Leonard C. Woolley of the expedition, is conclusive evidence of the flood as recorded in Genesis! Thus, in 1929

[20] For an example see II Samuel 8:4 compared with I Chronicles 18:4.

a Bible narrative that has long been classed as mythical is definitely confirmed as true. To these recent examples many more could be added. The plain fact is that the fund of archeological, scientific, and historical research is strongly in favor of the accuracy of the Bible. Even such a liberal-minded critic as Dean Farrar of England said that no demonstrable error has ever been found in the Bible.

But in spite of all of this, there are difficulties in the text that we cannot yet reconcile. There are hard places that not even the best of us can understand, and perhaps we never shall understand them with our present knowledge. But few things of any vital consequence are without their difficulties. Consider God's other revelation given to us in nature. What is science but a continuous, progressive attempt to explain the manifold mysteries of nature?

To reject, therefore, a doctrine because we do not understand every detail of it is foolish. Moreover, it is unscientific. Every scientist accepts the law of gravity, believes in electricity as an actual manifestation of energy, and credits the reality of radioactive phenomena. But does any scientist fully understand all about these things? Of course not! The important point is that the scientist understands enough of the facts to establish the correctness of his view. After honestly attempting to solve the

obscure problems, he leaves them to be cleared up as his scientific knowledge increases. But the basic theories and laws are accepted as essential parts of his scientific thinking. So it should be with such a question as the verbal inspiration of Scripture. The preponderance of facts and the weight of logic favor it. The comparatively few real difficulties can well wait for the enlightenment of future knowledge when they will doubtless be solved as have many similar difficulties in the past.

So much for the theory of verbal inspiration as it is held to-day by leading Bible scholars. Other theories need engage us but briefly, for they all shade off from the verbal view. For instance, one theory stresses the inspiration of the thought units in contrast to the words. But the difficulty remains that thought cannot be expressed apart from words. Another theory, that of moral inspiration, avers that only in treating of moral and spiritual questions is the Bible inerrant and that historically it is open to mistakes. But if the Bible be unreliable historically, how can one trust it when it deals with all-important matters of the spirit? Prove a witness untruthful in one section of his testimony and you have cast serious doubt on the reliability of his entire testimony. Even more damaging, however, is the fact that the moral theory is at variance with Christ's

clear statement that "the Scripture cannot be broken." He at least made absolutely no distinction on the ground of trustworthiness between the moral and the historical import of the Old Testament. On the contrary, He accepted all of it. And so this theory of moral inspiration leads to a fatal difficulty. For Christ believed the Old Testament to be throughout true. If any portion of it be untrue, He was mistaken. But to those who regard Him as the divine Son of God and thus accept His Deity, such a conclusion is unthinkable. Furthermore, the tendency of archeological investigation and the best historical research is toward a confirmation rather than a rejection of the historical accuracy of the Bible.

It may be well at this juncture to make a caution. Though verbal inspiration is by far the best explanation of the fact of Scripture, yet in holding this view, not only must due allowance be made for the personalities and literary individualities of the writers, but one must also take into account the varying purposes of different portions of the Bible. Paul's statement that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," [21] makes this very clear. In writing the Revelation, the Apostle John was "in the Spirit" lifted, as it

[21] II Timothy 3:16.

were, out of his normal personality. Wonderful visions of heaven and of the future were vouchsafed him, and God told him expressly what to write. That is one extreme. At the other extreme is such a book as I Chronicles, the opening part of which is composed almost exclusively of genealogical records. Undoubtedly God inspired the unknown author of Chronicles, for these genealogical tables have their place in Scripture; but who would say that this writer had as high a message to impart as that which the beloved disciple was inspired to record in his Gospel?

The examples just mentioned open the way for the making of an important distinction, that between inspiration and revelation. All Scripture is inspired in that, as we have seen, God guided the authors and kept their work free from error. But not all Scripture is revelation. Revelation is rather the unveiling or showing forth of a spiritual truth hitherto unknown and unknowable by man alone. Everything in the Bible is there because God ordained it to be there and inspired the writers to set it down, but everything in the Bible is not by any means revelation.

In this simple distinction lies the key to a good deal of misunderstanding. The skeptic, for instance, rails against the Old Testament as immoral because

it frankly records examples of human depravity. He quotes with glee the philosophy of such a book as Ecclesiastes in which is recorded the philosophy of Solomon's apostate days, and sets it up in contrast to the sound philosophy of the prophets. How unreasonable! These seemingly questionable portions of the Bible are inspired and rightly so. Is there not value in the record of an outlook upon life such as that which Solomon gives in Ecclesiastes? Lacking it admittedly is, being merely the philosophy of the natural man. Yet it is none the less true. It is an example of an interesting paradox —what we may call a true record of a false philosophy. And it is in the Bible not as infallible revelation to be followed in daily living, but for our instruction as an instance of the vanity and hollowness of mere human striving for happiness. So with many incidents throughout the Old Testament. The horrible deed of Jael in driving a nail through the temple of the sleeping Sisera,[22] the dastardly act of David in planning Uriah's murder,[23] the moral lapses of the patriarchs—these things are recorded by inspiration in that God moved the authors to write them down as examples of the sinful depths to which men and women fall when they depart from the

[22] Judges 4.
[23] II Samuel 11.

fear of the Lord. They are written for our instruction, to enlighten us as to the desperately wicked state of the human heart. The Bible is above all honest, and in its mirror-like reflection of humanity is absolutely frank. In this function as in others it is inspired, but in this function it is not always revelation, as in the case of the "deep things of God" when recorded in the Gospel of John or in the Epistle to the Romans.

Nevertheless, this distinction between inspiration and revelation, with the paradox regarding a true record of a false idea, must not be allowed to obscure the central fact that the Bible is actually the inerrant Word of God. Neither should the existence of various theories of inspiration in any way hide the great truth that Scripture is, in its entirety, "God-breathed" and therefore always in accord with the facts. There is far more danger of being mistaken through a too loose view of inspiration than of being mistaken through overemphasizing the extent and detail to which God's supervision of His Word extended. Indeed, as the late Dr. W. H. Griffith-Thomas stated, only when verbal inspiration is insisted upon in the narrow sense as a mechanical, "dictation" theory is it misleading. Similarly, the modern tendency to make much of seeming dis-

crepancies and small errors quite exceeds any inclination to accept all of the Bible as true.

After all, the vital thing is to grasp the purpose of the Scriptures. According to our Lord's statement in John 5:39, they were given to "testify" of Him. God gave His revelation solely to make clear the way of salvation, so that all men beholding it might walk therein and have eternal life. In maintaining the integrity of this great purpose in the essential truth of all its minor utterances, as well as in its record of fact, the Bible is the inerrant Word of God.

But we have gone far enough to see clearly the vital importance of this question of inspiration. As James Anthony Froude, the great English historian, admirably said, "The inspiration of the Bible is the foundation of our whole belief." He was right. Inspiration accredits the Book. Uninspired, it is mere literature; great and lofty though it be, it cannot speak with authority to the hungry soul of man. Inspired, it is God's Book and speaks, as did Christ, the Incarnate Word, "as one having authority and not as the scribes." Therefore, it is a Book which is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."[24]

[24] II Timothy 3:16, 17.

## *Chapter Four*

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE

To UNDERSTAND the significance of a building, a musical composition, or a book—in fact, any production of an active intelligence—one must comprehend something of the relationship of its parts one to another. This relationship reveals the structure of the whole, and thus speaks of the active intelligence which created it. A great structure signifies a great architect; a small mind cannot produce a sublime result. This obvious principle applies to the Bible quite as much as to other books. In the wonderful unity and progressive harmony of its structure, the Bible points unmistakably to an Author of supreme intelligence.

Now how is structure in the case of a book discovered? The answer is simple. Comprehension of structure is gained by the observation that comes from first-hand knowledge of the book in question. Although at first only a portion of the structural basis of the work may be glimpsed, it is the recognition of a pattern or design that is important.

Whether it be an arch in building, or a refrain in poetry, the pattern is the key to structural understanding.

In view of these facts, it is quite in keeping with the divine simplicity and clarity of the Bible that the key to its structure lies in the most easily observed place—the beginning. God's book is both simple and profound; the unlearned can grasp its outlines, but the greatest scholars cannot plumb its deeps. That the Pentateuch, the first five books, should be its structural pattern is, therefore, beautifully consistent. Almost from the very time of their writing, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy have been classed as a separate division of Scripture. Traditionally the work of the same author, Moses, they are indissolubly bound together in theme, style, and treatment. The frequency with which our Lord quoted these books shows the high value He placed upon them. Indeed, the Pentateuch contains all of subsequent Scripture in germ. Is it any wonder, then, that it has been found to be the pattern for the structure of God's Word?

The working out of this pattern is simple. The Bible as a whole may be divided into five Pentateuchs, of which that containing the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

is the first. And these Pentateuchs correspond not only in number, but also in respective lines of thought. In the diagram on page 64 Pentateuchal structure is graphically portrayed.

At this point we must digress in order to speak briefly of an interesting but neglected line of study that is indispensable to our investigation of the beauties of Biblical structure. The common numbers are used in the Bible with a consistent and meaningful symbolism. While this fact has long been fairly evident, certain scholars, such as Dr. Arthur T. Pierson and F. W. Grant, have worked out the really marvelous intricacies of the numerical element of Scripture and by their researches [1] have shown that Biblical structure is at bottom mathematical.

In brief, the mathematical system of Scripture is based upon the first three digits (1, 2, and 3) in various combinations with 4. The most significant numbers are 1 to 7, although 8, 10, 12, and 40 also have recognizable meanings. In each case the symbolism is first, simple and in accord with common sense; and second, consistent in its application in all parts of the Bible. Take, for instance, the number 40. The deluge lasted 40 days and 40 nights. Moses'

[1] A. T. Pierson, *The Bible and Spiritual Criticism;* F. W. Grant, *The Numerical Bible.*

life divides into three periods of 40 years each. The three reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon were each of them 40 years. Elijah's journey to Horeb lasted 40 days. There were 40 days of Christ's temptation and for 40 days He was seen after the resurrection and prior to the ascension. Surely, there is a significant harmony in all of this.

But what do these numbers stand for throughout the Bible? Their generally accepted meanings are as follows:

1. Being the prime number, this naturally signifies beginning. Hence, 1 stands in Scripture for source, unity, sovereignty, creation, and chiefly God (the first, or creative, Person of the Trinity).
2. This has a twofold implication—a good and an evil sense. In its favorable implication it speaks of covenant (an agreement between two parties), help, and hence salvation (one helping another one). Thus it stands for the second, or redemptive, Person of the Trinity. In its evil sense it implies division, separation, and strife, 2 being the first divisible number.
3. This is the number of manifestation. The 3 dimensions and the 3 forms of matter (solid, liquid, and gaseous) reveal the world about us.

The fullest human life is lived in the threefold plane of body, mind, and spirit. God is a Trinity of 3 coequal Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and it is the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, who manifests a world-wide witness to God.

4. A number of further divisibility, 4 stands for the weakness found in the world and man. In common parlance we speak of "the four corners of the earth." Important is the indirect meaning of trial, testing, and experience, derived from the fact that the earth is the scene of man's testing.

5. Here we have 4 + 1—in other words, the earthly under the divine power. 5 stands, then, for responsibility, as it shows the world and man under the governance of Deity. The 5 senses and the 5 fingers of the hand are symbols of man's power whereby he performs acts of responsibility.

6. In the Bible this number generally has an intensely evil significance. By addition 4 (earthly things) + 2 (division and strife), or 3 (manifestation) × 2 (division and strife), it stands for the manifestation of sin and evil. Therefore, we find the antichrist in Revelation 13: 18 marked by the number 666, while

Nebuchadnezzar's idolatrous image in Daniel 3 is 60 cubits high.

7. Here is the number of full perfection and completion. The sum of 4 (the number of man and the world) + 3 (divine manifestation), it speaks of the thing created linked to manifesting Deity, and that for the creation is obviously perfection. 7 is prominent in Scripture and always signifies perfection or completion. Especially is it used in such a symbolic book as Revelation, where it is the key to much of the prophetic imagery.

8. As the series is complete in 7, 8 signifies a new beginning, and thus stands for the new in contrast to the old. Observe the eighth day which is really the first day of a new week, or the eighth note of the musical scale which is the same as the first.

10. Considered as twice 5, 10 stands for responsibility intensified, signifying the measure of responsibility and its judgment or reward. Examples are the 10 commandments, the 10 plagues of Egypt, the Old Testament obligation of tithing (giving 1/10 to God), and the 10 virgins of Christ's parable of responsibility.

12. This number, composed of the same factors as 7 (multiplied [4 × 3] instead of added), sym-

bolizes God's perfect, divine accomplishment actively manifested. Thus Revelation describes the Holy City in heaven as having 12 gates, 12 foundations, and a measure of 12,000 furlongs each way.

40. This is the number of full judgment or testing, being 4 (the number of man and the world) × 10 (responsibility intensified). Hence the deluge of 40 days and nights and Israel's wandering of 40 years in the wilderness.

This, in brief, is the mathematical basis of Scripture. Its logic is evident. Order and number prevail everywhere in nature. Crystallography shows that even the insensate minerals are governed by precise mathematical law; the very elements themselves are arranged in an exact mathematical scale; there are few things so strictly measured as the numbers of vibrations which make up the musical scale of seven notes; visible light, with its tremendous speed of vibration, is confined to a spectrum of seven colors; and the stars in their courses travel according to mathematical orbits. Thus it is but to be expected that God's verbal creation, the Bible, should be in accord with the order of the natural creation.

We are now ready to consider carefully the plan of Pentateuchal structure. First of all, let us regard

## THE PENTATEUCHAL STRUCTURE OF SCRIPTURE

| | The Old Testament | | | | The New Testament |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | The Law | The Covenant-History | The Prophets | The Poetical (Experience) Books | The Christian Scriptures |
| 1 | Genesis | Joshua | Isaiah | Psalms | Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John |
| 2 | Exodus | Judges and Ruth | Jeremiah and Lamentations | Job | Acts |
| 3 | Leviticus | Samuel and Kings | Ezekiel | Solomon's Song | Pauline Epistles |
| 4 | Numbers | Captivity Books: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther | Daniel | Ecclesiastes | Catholic (General) Epistles |
| 5 | Deuteronomy | Chronicles | Minor Prophets | Proverbs | Revelation |

After F. W. Grant, *The Numerical Bible*, Loizeaux Bros.

the five Pentateuchs as separate units. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy stand first under the title of "The Law." They are clearly the beginning, or source, books, and God is revealed in them as the Sovereign Creator and Author of all things. From the Law all subsequent doctrines of Scripture stem.

Second, is the Covenant-History Pentateuch—composed of Joshua, Judges and Ruth, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, the captivity books (Esther, Nehemiah, and Ezra), and I and II Chronicles. Here the meanings of 2 dominate. The Covenant of the Law made between God and Israel at Sinai[2] is traced in the history of the chosen people. On the one hand, is God's help and salvation, evidenced throughout these books by His constant intervention in their behalf. On the other hand, is the growing record of strife and division (the evil meaning of 2) culminating in the captivities as pictured in the latter part of this Pentateuch.

The third Pentateuch, the Prophetical Books, is one of manifestation. It gives the divine side of the sad story of the Covenant-History. A prophet is but an instrument or mouthpiece of the Lord, chosen to manifest Jehovah's message. While the Israelites were slipping away from God and, because of sin,

[2] Exodus 19.

being separated from a redemptive walk with Him, God constantly manifested His sanctifying and cleansing counsels through His prophets.

Fourth, are the Experience Books—Psalms, Job, Solomon's Song, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs. In beautiful poetical form they set forth the practical and spiritual experiences of man in the world.

Finally, the Christian Scriptures stand in the fifth, or Deuteronomic, position. Here the divine climax as shown in the sovereign power of God in Christ is added to the four Old Testament Pentateuchs. Here is the great message of salvation in which is made clear the awful responsibility of all who read it to accept Christ as Lord. Thus the four Pentateuchs find their consummation of responsibility in this fifth Pentateuch where Christ is "all and in all."

With this exposition of the underlying meaning and unity of the five Pentateuchs in mind, let us view the harmony of Biblical structure from another aspect. Considering the five books of the Law as patterns and reading *across* our diagram, we shall see that the component books follow in their general characteristics and aim the five books of the first Pentateuch. For instance, Genesis, as its name and numerical position implies, is clearly a book of beginnings, recording the origin of the earth in its present form, the origin of man and all living things,

the beginning of sin, death, civilization, etc. And the other initial books of the other four Pentateuchs will be found to share the same general character as Genesis. Thus Joshua marks distinctly a new beginning in that it records the start of Israelitish life in the Promised Land. Isaiah gives the inception of Messianic prophecy, Psalms stand as the first of the poetical writings, and the Gospels, recording as they do the most wonderful of all beginnings, that of God incarnate in Christ, cannot but stand at the head of the last, or New Testament, Pentateuch.

On the other hand, the scope of Exodus is different. Occupying the second place, it is built around the central incident of the Passover and the flight of the Israelites after their deliverance by the shed blood of the lamb. Thus it speaks of salvation, the good meaning of 2. A contrast is Judges, which in its picture of the internal strife of Israel shows the evil meaning of 2, although it is also a book of redemption, for, despite the degradation of the times, the one mitigating fact is continual, saving intervention through the divinely appointed Deliverer-Judge. Ruth, that idyllic short story, is a parable of redemption, while Jeremiah, the great prophet of impending captivity, writes in another time of Exodus, an Exodus, however, not into, but as a punishment of sin, out of the Promised Land. In

Job, we find the evil meaning of 2 in the emphasis on the conflict and opposition of Satan to the child of God, but linked to this is the triumphant concluding lesson of the help and salvation vouchsafed Job from God. Finally, do we not have in the Acts a new Exodus, recording the divine outcalling of the Christian church, precisely as the Israelites were called of God out of Egypt?

Leviticus, again, is a pattern, this time for the "three" books. Its own message is one of sanctification and manifestation; it is concerned chiefly with the worship of God in the sanctuary, which, as we know, was of cubical, or three, form. Here God came into manifest relation with men. Here the sacrifices were offered and the blood of the innocent victim was poured out as an atonement for sin. And all the ritual of sacrifice and worship tended but to one end—holiness or sanctification of the individual heart and life unto the Lord, who is infinitely holy. Consider now the "three" books in the various Pentateuchs, and the same general ideas are duplicated. Samuel and Kings not only record the highest manifestation of the earthly power of Israel, but also center round the temple. Ezekiel is the priestly prophet, and the Song of Solomon manifests in allegory the sanctity of the relation between Christ and the Church. As for

the Pauline Epistles, they point the way clearly to the sanctification of the sinner, give a masterly exposition of the atonement, and manifest the Gospel of Christ in all its fullness.

Numbers, as well as the other "four" books, tells chiefly of man's failure and his earthly testing. Just as Israel, lacking faith at Kadesh-barnea, failed to enter the Promised Land and so was condemned to the forty years of testing in the wilderness, so the captivity books record the worldly trial of God's people. Daniel is unique among the prophets in its wide view of world-history, past and future, while Ecclesiastes is a setting forth of earthly philosophy as recorded by Solomon, the great king, who failed to live up to the high promise of his youth. The General Epistles, of course, deal with the earthly walk of the Church through trial and testing.

In Deuteronomy the first Pentateuch finds its great summation. Here, in the oratorical discourses of Moses, are repeated the provisions of the Law, together with God's wonderful dealings with Israel. Consequently, we find in Chronicles an historical summary, while the minor prophets comprise a recapitulation of prophecy. Proverbs contains the practical and spiritual wisdom of centuries. Last of all, Revelation is the divine, climacteric summing up of all Scripture and all things both in earth and

in heaven. In all of these books the relation to man's active power under God's governance is clear and the note of responsibility and judgment is marked.

From the foregoing discussion the logic of the Pentateuchal structure of the Bible is evident. Few things will do more to give the reader a thorough grasp of the Bible as a whole than an understanding of this structure as we have considered it. Indeed, the importance of mastering this line of thought can hardly be overestimated.

*Chapter Five*

## THE BIBLE A SPIRITUAL ORGANISM

THE structure of the Bible as we have been considering it is of great importance. That its ordered perfection points to something higher is undeniable. Every building must have an architect, and the more beautiful the building, the greater the architect. This is true also of books, the buildings of the mind. Now in the case of the Bible, structure is present to such a degree and in such a way that it is more than a mark of genius in the author; it is a phenomenon that points back to a supernatural source. You cannot have the design without the designer, and when, as in the case of the Bible, the design is such that no human being could conceive, then the designer must be supernatural. Simple logic asserts that the effect can never be greater than the cause.

An example will make the point clear. The achievements of science and art are many. The specialists in the various fields of activity produce astounding results. The great battleship, floating

fortress of steel submissive in every detail to the will of its commander; the giant locomotive, hauling thousands of tons across a continental divide; the lofty Woolworth Tower, high as a mountain and graceful as a cathedral spire; the master works of Bach, beautiful in their elaborate polyphony; the merciful technique of surgery with its resulting conquest of disease—these are some of the wonderful manifestations of the creative force of the human mind. But staggering as they and countless similar achievements are, there is a point beyond which human power cannot go. When we come to the conferring of life, man is helpless. No scientist, philosopher, or writer has succeeded in creating a single living thing.

Now the Bible is a *living* book. It has life. In short, it is an organism, not a compilation; a living unity, not an organization. As Ex-President Patton of Princeton says, in his *Fundamental Christianity,* "One can hardly help seeing that the Bible is an organism, not a miscellaneous collection of writings." Furthermore, it is an organism in a very real sense. For it actually *lives* as no other book can be said to live.

The truth of this arresting fact is easily demonstrated. Biology tells us that an organism is a body composed of different organs or parts performing

special functions that are mutually dependent and essential to life. The analogy is evident. The Bible has parts: more than three score separate books comprise it. These parts have functions. Each of the sacred books has its purpose. Genesis, the first, has a distinctive message. So has Revelation, the last, and Obadiah, that tiniest of Old Testament prophecies. Without Genesis, the Bible would be incomplete, lacking an adequate beginning; without Revelation, it would be deprived of its glorious closing summary; without Obadiah, one of the remarkable evidences of God's justice as seen in fulfilled prophecy would be missing. So with all the other books or parts of this organism. Some are of major importance, like the heart or the brain in a physical body. Cut out the Gospel of John, for instance, and you have taken away the very heart of the Bible; remove the Pauline Epistles and you have done away with the brain of the New Testament. On the other hand, some of the smaller books, such as Esther or III John, fill a less large place. Nevertheless, they make their unique contributions to the whole. Who would dispense with Esther's reassuring evidence of God's faithful guidance over those who had rejected Him, but whom He still watches? Or who would cut out John's vivid thumb-nail contrast of the hospitable Gaius, the domineering Dio-

trephes, and the exemplary Demetrius, with its invaluable hints regarding peace in the Church?

But even if we should destroy a portion of the Bible, could that part be replaced? Who, since the days of the apostle himself, is capable of giving us another Gospel of John? Has there been any man in history capable of writing the Pauline Epistles? Would anyone be able to duplicate even Obadiah, with its divinely accurate prediction of future events? The answer is clear that, like the parts of a physical body, the books of the Bible are irreplaceable.

Our analogy, however, goes a step further. Granted that a member of this organism, the Bible, were taken away, there would be a definite effect upon the other members: not only is each member unique and irreplaceable, but it is also dependent in its functions upon its fellows. There is an essential unity between the various books of the Bible that can be broken only at a loss to all of them. To a greater or a less degree, each book is linked in theme and in reference to every other book. Like nerves and blood vessels, certain leading themes run through all Scripture and knit it together in this perfect unity.

So much, briefly, for the outward characteristics of the Biblical organism. One essential fact remains.

Any organism must be related to life either as a present attribute or a past possession; it must either be alive or it must at one time have contained life.

Now the Bible is alive, not dead. It is a living organism, not only containing life, but also having the power of passing life on and perpetuating the vital force. The life the Bible possesses is that of the Spirit of God. Through its pages men know the living Christ. The Messiah of the Old Testament, long prophesied, is in a sense incarnate in the New Testament. The fact is tremendous, not to be duplicated in the case of any other book. There are many great biographies, but only one New Testament. Men read Cellini's vivid story of his own life or Boswell's absorbing portrait of Dr. Johnson. But would any man be so foolish as to say that he *knew* Cellini, or actually *felt* the presence of Dr. Johnson? Has any rational man ever chosen a life of self-sacrifice impelled by a sense of the nearness of the subject of a great biography? But David Livingstone read Christ's words and, feeling a tremendous reality in the simple statement, "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,"[1] took this "word of a gentleman" at its face value, and became the heroic missionary-explorer of his age. For nearly twenty centuries

[1] Matthew 28:20.

myriads have claimed first-hand relationship with One of whom they have merely read in the Bible. On the basis of a few brief chapters they have yielded their lives to a certain Galilean. Following His commands they have been led to heights of service and of love that have enriched immeasurably the human race. Yes, there is life in this Book! Through its pages there pulsates the vitality of the Son of God. The glory of the simple record transcends the bounds of tongue and pen, and reaches out beyond the page to kindle human hearts and quicken with spiritual life all who read in faith.

The design, as we have said, presupposes a designer. Structure must have an architect. And structure that is vitally organic is alive, not dead. Man alone, however, is incapable of producing life. Therefore, the conclusion is plain. The Bible, a living organism, conferring life on all who read it with the eyes of faith, of necessity presupposes the Divine Author, God; for He is the only Being who can give life where life has not before existed.

## *Chapter Six*

## SEVEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLE STUDY

As one enters upon a study of any extent, it is of the utmost help to him to have a few principles which will serve for guides as he penetrates deeper and deeper into his subject. In our opening chapter we used the illustration of a building, comparing the structure of the Bible to the supporting girders and beams. The progress of knowledge regarding Scripture we likened to the addition of the bricks, wood, and mortar to the framework. We also noted the necessity for guiding principles of building so that the structure of knowledge might grow in an orderly and symmetrical fashion.

In the case of Bible study these guiding principles are thematic in that they are related to the great lines of thought that run through Scripture. We shall here point out seven which embody the major themes of the Bible. They may be traced all through the Book and, if clearly grasped, will be of inestimable aid in understanding God's revelation.

The first we shall call the *Principle of Creative*

*Sovereignty.* God is supreme, the Author not only of the world but of the entire universe. He rules all things in accordance with His sovereign will. He is an active Governor of the Universe, not, as certain forms of the evolutionary hypothesis assert, a Deity who has set the vast universal machinery in motion and has then, like an "absentee landlord," left it to its own devices. Rather is He an interested, ever-present Sovereign guiding with scrupulous and loving care all things, be they great or small. This truth is fraught with great comfort. It was clear to Jesus, who had it in mind when He spoke of the very hairs of our head being numbered.[1] The Principle of Creative Sovereignty accordingly means that God exercises a supervisory care over the course of history. And how could it be otherwise when we consider His great purpose in redeeming man? All things truly "work together for good,"[2] but they work together only under the guidance of the Sovereign Creator. Thus we see this principle operating in a book such as Esther, where, even though God is not named, evidence of divine guidance of His people is abundant. Again, it is this principle that underlies prophecy, that portion of Scripture which contains the future

[1] Matthew 10:30.
[2] Romans 8:28.

history not only of Israel but, in its broad outlines, of the whole world. In fact, the principle is essentially an historical one, and it holds even outside Scripture. The world is ordered by God. The future history of the race is in His care, and, as prophecy tells us, the grand consummation of all things in the glorified Christ is nigh. More than any other, this first principle exhibits the three great natural attributes of God—His omniscience, or perfect knowledge; His omnipotence, or all-powerfulness; and His omnipresence, or faculty of being everywhere throughout His universe at the same time. For only a supreme Being possessed of these attributes could supervise a universe in the manner shown by this Principle of Creative Sovereignty.

The next is an opposing principle which we shall call the *Principle of the Power of Evil.* In contrast to the Sovereign God there is manifest throughout the Bible an active force of evil. That this is more than an impersonal force is evident from the frequency with which Scripture speaks of Satan or the devil. The Bible leaves no doubt about the actual personality of Satan and the far-reaching extent of his machinations for the moral and spiritual overthrow of man. Indeed, it expressly asserts that the present world-order is dominated by him, and will remain in this state until set free from its bondage

by Christ's reappearance. Thus even Christ spoke of Satan as the Prince of this World,[3] and Paul's letters are full of references [4] to his actual personality. To be sure, the modern tendency is to consider Satan as merely a poetic personification of an abstract principle. But this is dangerous ground. Deny the devil's actuality and you make it easier for him to work. For he is undoubtedly active in the world and still seeks to deceive "even the very elect."

From the beginning of Scripture Satan is present. The original solicitation to evil that led to "man's first disobedience" came from him. He was the suggestive force, the crafty tempter, that motivated every crime from Cain's fratricide to the martyrdom of Stephen. He led the Israelites off into idolatry, and he, with all the resources at his command, tries to circumvent Christ's work of salvation. As a matter of fact, he is constantly in evidence throughout Scripture and the events it records. And his very presence focuses our attention upon another of God's characteristics—the inscrutable nature of His purpose. Why God should permit the existence of a being so malignant as Satan is beyond human power to understand; it is one of those eternal mysteries that will be solved, if ever, only in the future. And

[3] John 14:30.
[4] For example, Ephesians 6:11, 12.

it takes just such a fact as the existence of Satan to prove to minds that are so prone as ours to take undue pride in knowledge, that God's ways are past finding out. In the presence of the problem of Satan, man can but acknowledge his ignorance and rest upon the great truths of God's love and mercy toward an erring world.

Our third guide is the *Principle of Redemption.* We have already seen that to make known God's plan for the redemption of mankind is the central purpose of the Bible. What are the essentials of the divine plan which assures our eternal salvation? What is the rationale of redemption? Briefly it is this: God, by His very nature, is infinitely[5] pure and holy. He is light and in Him is no darkness at all. Consequently sin (the blackest of darkness) is the very opposite of purity and holiness; it cannot exist in the presence of God. For Him to tolerate it would be for Him to violate the essential holiness of His nature. Now, when man first disobeyed God, he contaminated with the defilement of sin not only himself, but also the whole race. One of the saddest traits of human nature is this inborn tendency of man to do wrong. Wicked thoughts

[5] It is important to grasp the idea bound up in the word "infinite." It means without limit or measure. The number of the grains of sand or the fish of the sea is beyond our ability to count, yet an infinite number is immeasurably greater.

and impulses are native to all of us, and it is only the hypocrite who will deny their presence.

Recall now the immediate effect of the sin of Adam and Eve. They were cut off from fellowship with God and driven from His presence. Just so does sin in these days debar us from walking with God. And how could it be otherwise? As Paul says, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."[6] Every soul bears the black stains of defiance of a perfect Lord. And every man is thus unfit to stand in His Presence. All are in darkness, the darkness of sin. He is light, the light of infinite holiness. Light and darkness cannot exist together. So the natural man cannot remain in the presence of God. And not only is man shut out from contact with God, but he can never, through his own efforts, atone for the sin which he has committed. This fact is not the harsh judgment of a cruel God, but simply the logical result of a transgression of such magnitude as sin. Sin is never a petty matter.[7] Rather is it always far-reaching, an offense of infinite implications because committed against an

[6] Romans 3:23.

[7] A striking evidence of the enormity of so-called petty sins is Romans 1:24-32, where Paul sums up in a terrific indictment the results of Gentile departure from God. In the same category with the major crimes such as murder and fornication, the apostle places common so-called "petty" sins like contentiousness, spite, pride, gossip, etc.

infinite God. The tendency to belittle sins is, therefore, most dangerous, for it blunts the moral sensibilities to the deep iniquity of every sinful thought or act.

Thus far, the condition of man is hopeless. Contaminated with sin, he is forever cut off from God; powerless to atone for his transgression, he is doomed to eternal darkness; and were God perfect only in holiness, purity, and justice, perhaps man would forever have been estranged from his Maker. But God, as John tells us, is also love. And where holiness, purity, and justice are outraged, love steps in. God *loves* His erring creature. His heart yearns for him. He looks upon the sinner with compassionate favor, and in His grace gives man an opportunity to come back to Him. Motivated solely by love, the Holy One thus gives His Son as a voluntary sacrifice for the sinner. So Christ came into the world, and freely gave His life "a ransom for many." [8] His death on the cross was a complete atonement, and reconciled man to God. His death satisfied divine justice, for the Son is infinite, being equal with God, and only His infinite, divine suffering could atone for the infinite crime of sin. The sinner does nothing. The salvation so dearly purchased is his, on but one condition. He must believe that the

[8] Matthew 20:28.

Son of God died for him, he must see himself identified with the atonement in that Christ suffered on his behalf for his sins. When he accepts this by a simple act of faith, God gives him newness of spiritual life, the sinner is born again into the spiritual world, and once more has fellowship with his Maker.

This, then, is the Principle of Redemption. We shall find it in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It will confront us in direct statement, in symbol, and in parable. Scripture is full of it, and it runs like an unbroken line through the whole of God's Word.

Our fourth principle is in the nature of a contrast to redemption. It is the *Principle of Retribution.* Because God's love is so wonderfully manifested in redemption, His justice is not thereby set aside. One must grasp the great fact that God is perfect in character. Now perfection implies *completeness;* the undeveloped or unbalanced character cannot be perfect. If God were only love, or only purity, or only justice, He would not be perfect. On the contrary, His perfection depends upon the absolutely symmetrical balance of these infinite characteristics. So the infinite justice of God must continue to operate alongside His infinite love.

This is precisely what the Principle of Retribution

affirms. Despite the gift of salvation, all men have not returned to fellowship with their Creator. Man is a free moral agent. As we have already seen, God has given him a free will and the power of personal choice. Redemption is his for the taking, but he must choose to take it. It is the tragedy of the universe that many immortal souls have deliberately chosen to pass by the great gift of salvation. In their natures the preponderance of evil has been so great that they have of their own accord refused to accept forgiveness through Christ's atonement. Consequently they remain in darkness. Clad only in their unrighteousness, still contaminated with the infinite guilt of sin, they must eternally remain in darkness outside the Presence of God. His justice, the very nature of His Being, demands this fair penalty. And His infinite purity and holiness reinforce the mandates of divine justice. Darkness cannot coexist with light; uncleanness cannot abide with purity.

Like redemption, this principle is far-reaching. All through the Bible we find it. Just retribution is the law of the world. "The soul that sinneth," as God said through Ezekiel, "it shall die." [9] The Law is unchangeable. Indeed, there is a sense in which not even redemption turns it aside, for Christ died

[9] Ezekiel 18:4.

for the sins of all, and in Him all who believe are "dead unto sin."

Fifthly, we have the *Principle of a Chosen People.* In His plan of redemption, God had a great revelation to give the world. It was His divine purpose to choose as a medium or vehicle for this revelation a certain people. Adam's direct posterity became so increasingly wicked that finally God could no longer tolerate humanity; man had become so vile that, as Genesis tells us, "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." [10] The deluge was the merited judgment of an utterly corrupt race. In Noah and his family only a small group was saved. After the flood, this family became the ancestors of the present race. Of the three sons of Noah, Shem and his descendants were picked as the medium for the divine revelation. Of the Shemitic seed was Abram who, by faith, became Abraham, the father of the chosen people, Israel, whose number was to be as the sands of the sea and the stars of the heaven. In Abraham's seed all the families were to be blessed.[11] From the time of the patriarchs God called these people to be separate, a holy nation unto Him. To them He committed progressively His greatest revelation, so that

[10] Genesis 6:5.
[11] Genesis 12:1-3.

they might shine as a torch of divine light throughout the world. He gave them the basic truth of monotheism, the great affirmation that God is one God.

Too few persons ever pause to reflect upon the supreme importance of this truth. That God is one God is the greatest idea in the world. Along with the Son, monotheism was God's highest gift to man. For its revealing God chose the Jewish people as the divinely-appointed medium. Seen in this light, their history is plain; Satan continually attacked them, centering his opposition always upon their divine mode of worship. In the very beginning of their history, simultaneously with the first revelation on Sinai of the one God, the leaven of polytheism crept in through the golden calf worship. For each lapse the Israelites were punished, until, as a final penalty, they were dispersed and carried away into captivity. Yet amid apostasy and iniquity, the torch of monotheism was passed on from age to age by consecrated spirits like Moses, Samuel, Elijah, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, Zechariah, and Malachi, with the foreordained result that when Christ came He found as the basis of His self-manifestation the Old Testament with its marvelous revelation of the Lord God, Jehovah, the Creator and Father of all mankind. And if, at any time during

the long process, evil *had* conquered and monotheism had been completely submerged in the worship of Baal, Ashteroth, or any of the other obscene deities of the neighboring races, the hope of the world would have been lost, and the history of humanity would have been a record of deepening shadow rather than the ever-lightening picture it really is as the result of the illumination brought to the hearts of men by the One God and His incarnate Son.

Again, as the centuries passed, God continued to reveal Himself, and especially through prophecy began to make known the coming of the Messiah, who would redeem not only Israel, but the world. Furthermore, it was in God's providence that this Messiah should be born of the seed of Abraham and David, so that the chosen people would as a race bring forth the Saviour.

In view of these facts, is it any wonder that the Scriptures deal so largely with the Jews? For the eternal destiny of humanity, they are a people of cardinal importance. For them to have perished would have been a spiritual tragedy of infinite extent. For "unto them," as Paul says, "were committed the oracles of God." [12] And as we contemplate this Principle of a Chosen People, we catch anew the meaning of God's mercy. Despite the

[12] Romans 3: 1, 2.

honor that was theirs the Israelites continually fell into sin; again and again they denied their Lord and proved false to their high trust. Yet God always forgave, and though retribution was inevitable, yet He never wholly cast them off, but ever strove and still strives to reconcile them to Himself.

In previous chapters we have already dealt in part with the sixth guide, the *Principle of Structure.* We have seen something of the meaning of numerical symbolism, and we have observed its relation to the Biblical structure in the division of Scripture into five Pentateuchs. This, however, is but part of the truth comprehended in the Principle of Structure. Of similar importance are the seven dispensations, which divide the Bible into seven ages, and the eight covenants, whereby God mercifully entered into promise relations with man. Indeed, so vital to the understanding of Scripture are the dispensations and covenants that it will be necessary for us later to consider them at length.[13]

Seventh, and last, is the *Principle of Consummation through a Second Advent.* God's revelation is unique in that it answers two great questions—where man and the world came from, and what the destiny of all things will be. No other book has

[13] Cf. Chapters VII and VIII.

ever given such definite replies to these questions as the Bible. And it is with this query regarding destiny that our seventh principle is concerned. Just as Scripture gives satisfactory information as to creation and assigns the source of all things to God, so it sheds light upon the final consummation. According to the Bible the end of this world system will be signalized by the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nineteen hundred years ago He came in humiliation; "despised and rejected of men,"[14] He offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice for sin. But equally with this first advent the prophets proclaim His second coming. In fact, the second advent has more and fuller mention than the first. For every Bible reference to Christ's coming in humiliation, there are ten references to His return in glory. Naturally enough, this principle is exclusively a prophetic one. It exhibits to a wonderful degree the omniscience of God. Only One from whom nothing is hid, who has perfect understanding and knows the end from the beginning, could reveal so explicitly the facts relating to the consummation of all things in "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."[15]

These, then, are seven guiding principles for Bible

[14] Isaiah 53:3.
[15] Titus 2:13.

study. As one's knowledge of God's Word grows, the importance of these principles becomes more and more evident. Like the sinews in a physical organism, they knit the Bible together into a living whole.

## *Chapter Seven*

### GOD'S PLAN FOR THE AGES

One of the most striking features of the universe is the witness it bears to God's perfect knowledge. All the manifold laws of nature—and science is but beginning to uncover their complexity and symmetry—speak of His controlling mind. Only the out-and-out materialist would venture to deny this; other thinkers, whether Christian or unbelieving, cannot but infer the divine wisdom from the wonderful order of the universe. But—and here is where the philosopher who does not know the Bible falters—the future destiny of man and of the world is subject just as much to understandable laws as is the material realm. Indeed, if one pauses to reflect upon the nature of God, he will soon realize the necessity for this fact. One is reminded of certain undiscovered elements of the periodic system in chemistry which, because the system demanded their existence, were accurately described by scientists before they had actually been found.

God is supreme. He knows all things. For Him

time does not exist, and He alone is able to discern the end from the beginning. How, then, could it be otherwise than that the future is within His comprehension, that the great progression of the centuries is no disorganized march of years, and that the unfolding of the ages will reveal only what has from the beginning been ordained by Him? Once the fact of God is admitted, logic demands acceptance of this further fact, and true science signifies its assent. Even the master mind of Sir Isaac Newton was content humbly to study Scripture and trace therein the evidences of God's plan for the world.[1]

The teaching of the Bible regarding the course of history and future things, as is always the case when God's Word speaks on matters of great importance, is clear and explicit in its main outlines. For many years students of the Bible have recognized the fact that Scripture divides the history of the world, past and present, into certain ages or dispensations. To grasp this fact is essential for an intelligent comprehension of God's written revelation. In this connection one recalls Paul's admonition to his young friend Timothy,[2] in which the great

[1] It is not generally known that this great scientist was a keen student of the Bible and that he wrote a commentary on Daniel.

[2] II Timothy 2:15.
"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

apostle speaks of "rightly dividing the word of truth"; for without a knowledge of the dispensations it is very difficult to divide Scripture into those ages or epochs ordained by God for His dealings with humanity.

*A dispensation.* What is it? The word has in it the connotation of a superior dealing with an inferior. Thus we speak of a king dispensing mercy or a judge dispensing justice. On the one hand, the king or judge, clothed with power and authority, makes terms and specific conditions; on the other hand, the subject or the prisoner at the bar receives these terms and conditions. The analogy is useful, for it gives us an insight into the concept designated by the Scripture term "dispensation."

According to Dr. C. I. Scofield,[3] "a dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." Here we have a number of constituents which for the sake of clearness should be separated. First of all, there is the element of time, the background or scene of the dispensation. Next are two personalities—God, the dispenser; and man, the recipient of that which is dispensed. Again, we notice the thing dispensed—a specific or definite revelation of the will of God. Finally, there is the

[3] Note on Genesis 1:28, *Scofield Reference Bible.*

purpose of the period of time and of the revelation —in short, the purpose of the dispensation as a whole; it is given to *test* man as regards his obedience to the will of God revealed in the terms of the dispensation. This, therefore, is the underlying principle of the dispensation idea: God revealing His will, and man tested by that will.

"But why," it may be objected, "are there seven dispensations? Is God so fickle-minded that He must change His will as regards man seven times?" No, indeed! It is not God but man who has vacillated. Though there are seven [4] dispensations, they are all one in principle, being throughout based upon the single test of obedience. And had man been found able to keep the conditions laid down by the first dispensation, the other six would have been unnecessary. But man failed. Yet, instead of casting off His guilty creature, God was moved with compassion, and gave him a fresh trial under new conditions. Thus each dispensation ends with failure, and each new dispensation shows forth God's mercy. And so the dispensations exhibit two great principles: first, God's purpose of testing man; second, His unfailing mercy toward man's repeated failure to meet the divine conditions. Regarding

[4] Notice that *seven* is the number of completeness or perfection.

the testing, we may well pause to remark God's wisdom in choosing this as a means for His dealing with humanity. God made man a free moral agent. Now only by the method of testing can man's inherent moral freedom be demonstrated. Only by trial can the best in man be nurtured. Indeed, apart from testing, man would be an untried soul, and his allegiance to his Creator meaningless.

So much in general for the philosophy of the dispensations. In their sweep and in the insight into the counsels of the Almighty that they afford, they comprise a subject both vast and majestic. Let us now deal specifically with the seven dispensations.

*The Dispensation of Innocency.*[5] As the opening chapters of Genesis tell us, man was created in a state of purity, free from evil or corruption. Placed in the perfect environment of Eden, he had but one condition of testing to meet; all things were his with the exception of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," the fruit of which he was not to touch. For disobedience of this one restriction the penalty of death was fixed. Though the test was both plain and simple and the consequence of disobedience was explicitly given, humanity, as the familiar record tells us, failed. Her pride aroused by the subtle wiles of Satan, woman first transgressed, and man

[5] Institution: Genesis 1:28 ff. Extent: Genesis 1:28-3:23.

deliberately followed. As a result death entered the world, Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, and the Dispensation of Innocency passed.

*The Dispensation of Conscience.*[6] One of the immediate results of the failure under the Dispensation of Innocency was the fact that man attained an experimental knowledge of good and evil. The first sin stamped upon the human heart the knowledge of good as obedience and evil as disobedience to the known will of God. With this knowledge conscience awoke, and, with its awakening, came the second dispensation. Man, expelled from Eden, living amid sin and death, was responsible to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through sacrifice. This was the specific revelation of God's will during the Dispensation of Conscience. The result? We find it expressed with tragic brevity in the sixth chapter of Genesis. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."[7] Man had failed again and, by acting in direct and constant opposition to known right, had proved unequal to the test of conscience.

Drastic in the extreme was the penalty, coming

[6] Institution: Genesis 3:23, ff. Extent: Genesis 3:23-8:1.
[7] Genesis 6:5.

as it did in the form of a flood which wiped out all humanity with the exception of one family. But, when one pauses to consider the full implications of Genesis 6: 5, he must grant the justice of the penalty. What a terrific indictment of an iniquitous world! "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Compressed in these terse phrases is a story of conscious vileness and degradation almost beyond conception.

*The Dispensation of Human Government.*[8] After the flood, God placed humanity under a new test, whereby man was responsible to govern the world for God. Man was to rule man, but, in doing so, he was to be answerable to God. Until the failure of Israel and the captivities, this responsibility of government rested upon the entire race, Gentile as well as Israelite. Beginning with the captivities, however, the burden for human government passed over into exclusively Gentile hands. Here it remains even until the present. Sad to relate, this prerogative of government has been exercised by Israelite as well as Gentile for selfish, not divine ends. History is a melancholy commentary on the motives and results of human government.

As a racial testing, this dispensation ended in failure at Babel with the confusion of tongues as

[8] Institution: Genesis 8:20 ff. Extent: Genesis 8:20-11:9.

the judgment. In relation to the Chosen People, it closed with the penalty of the captivities. But, as applied to the Gentiles, it is still in force, overlapping, as we shall see, certain subsequent dispensations.

*The Dispensation of Promise.*[9] In contrast to the Dispensation of Human Government, which comprises both Israelite and Gentile, the Dispensation of Promise is entirely Israelitish. Abram, as recorded in Genesis 11, dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees. One day God spoke to him, calling him to leave his native country and go to the land of Canaan. Linked with this call was a promise. God said that He would make of Abram a great nation, that He would bless all who blessed Abram's descendants and curse all who cursed them, and He ended the promise with the great pledge that in Abram all nations of the earth would be blessed. It should be borne in mind that this dispensation, applying as it did only to Israel, was national, not world-wide. In this sense it might well be considered as a subhead under Human Government, which, for the Gentile world, is still in effect.

The condition of the Dispensation of Promise was extremely simple. Abram and his posterity

[9] Institution: Genesis 12:1 ff. Extent: Genesis 12:1-Exodus 19:3.

had but to dwell in the land in order to inherit all of the promised blessings. Failure to meet this condition meant loss of blessing, a fact strikingly illustrated by the sojourn in Egypt.

That a test so simple as this would be successfully met seems likely. However, Promise, as in the cases of the preceding dispensations, ends in rejection of the divine conditions. About five hundred years after Abraham, we find Israel assembled at Sinai. Although but recently delivered from the Egyptian bondage, they are yet a stiff-necked and rebellious people. Through Moses, God proposes the Law, and, as one voice, the people rise up and pledge themselves to obey it. And thus, by this rash acceptance of the Law, the Promise as a dispensation ends, although the pledges given by God to His people continue until fulfillment, for God's promises can never be broken.

Before leaving this chapter on God's dealings with man, we might well pause to remark that the first four dispensations are recorded in the twelve opening chapters of Genesis. This fact indicates with startling effectiveness the extreme condensation of this initial portion of Scripture. About two thousand five hundred years of human history are covered in less than twenty pages. Yet all we need to

know of these early times is recorded. Truly the ways of God in giving us His Word are beyond our understanding!

*The Dispensation of the Law.*[10] Three months after their miraculous deliverance from the oppressions of Pharaoh, the children of Israel entered the wilderness of Sinai. There, amid the wild and rugged desert, they pitched their tents before the mount. At the divine command, their leader Moses went up to the holy mountain, where he received a communication from God. "If," said God, "ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people . . . a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."[11] On his descent, Moses laid these words before the people. Their answer was decisive. "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do."[12] By acclamation they accepted the divine condition, and passed from Promise to Law.

Let us take time to notice the fact that like its predecessor this dispensation is peculiarly Israelitish. It is the chosen people, not the Gentiles, who declare in favor of the Law. For the Gentiles, the Dis-

[10] Institution: Exodus 19:3 ff. Extent: Exodus 19:3 to the completion of Christ's work on the Cross.
[11] Exodus 19:5, 6.
[12] Exodus 19:8.

pensation of Human Government overlaps the Law, as it overlapped Promise.

As we have seen, the condition of test which characterizes this dispensation is Law. Now just what was the Law? The question may be briefly answered. The Law was in three parts: the commandments, the judgments, and the ordinances. The commandments, summarized in the familiar decalogue, revealed the righteous will of God; the judgments governed the social life of the chosen people; the ordinances were the basis of the religious ceremonial of worship and sacrifice.

Under the terms of this dispensation, the Israelites were responsible for full obedience to this triple law in all its details. Their lack of success in achieving this obedience is a matter of Old Testament record. Even as regards the great fundamental precept that God is one God and that Israel should not bow down to any idol or graven image and should have no other gods but Jehovah, they went astray. Indeed, their failure to live up to this first commandment is representative of their relationship to the Law as a whole. Time and again they violated this divine command, until at last punishment fell in the captivities, when the northern kingdom of Israel was dispersed and the southern kingdom of Judah made subservient to Babylon and Persia.

Nevertheless, the Law continued in effect for another six hundred years, for the dispensation does not close until the Cross, this being a case where punishment preceded the end of the dispensation.

*The Dispensation of Grace.*[13] The sixth dispensation partakes of the nature of a transition. In its beginning Israelitish like Promise and the Law, it later broadens to universal scope and comprises all mankind. Furthermore, it has especial interest as the dispensation under which we are living.

Grace is briefly defined as the unmerited favor of God toward man. Or, to use the words of Paul, it is "the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man . . . not by works of righteousness which we have done."[14] Here we have succinctly expressed the distinction between Grace and the five preceding dispensations. Grace depends on what God does; man, undeserving and in himself unworthy, has but to believe to receive divine favor. On the other hand, the rewards under Law and the earlier dispensations are more nearly dependent on what man does. Or, to phrase the point differently, under Grace belief is chiefly tested. In this sense, Grace is perhaps the simplest as it is the broadest of the dis-

[13] Instituted by Christ's work on the Cross. First New Testament reference—John 1:17. Extent: From the Cross to Christ's second coming.

[14] Titus 3:4, 5.

pensations. It emphasizes the love of God, while the Dispensation of the Law, for instance, stresses His just wrath.

For the sake of clarity, it is well to divide Grace into two parts. The first we shall call the Jewish division; the second, the universal division. The Key to the dispensation as a whole is concisely stated in John 1:17: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." It is clear, then, that the dispensation is to be thought of as peculiarly related to our Lord. He inaugurated it, and He will close it at the great consummation when He appears again in glory.

As the four gospels clearly show, the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry proclaimed His Messiahship and offered Himself to the Jews as their predicted King. This was the Jewish division of the dispensation. But, instead of receiving Him, they hated Him, rejected Him, and by shameful crucifixion put Him to death. The test, then, was national acceptance or rejection of the Messiahship of Christ.

Now, with the death of Christ, the dispensation broadens; the test is still acceptance or rejection of Christ, but Gentiles as well as Jews are concerned. Was Christ the Saviour of the world, did He shed His blood for the sin of the world, did He die for the individual whether Jew or Greek, bond or free?

That was the great test question in the first century. That is the great test question in this twentieth century of Grace. An affirmative answer through simple belief in the crucified One brings a new heart and eternal life. Rejection means continuance in sin, the dominion of the baser elements in life, and final spiritual darkness apart from the presence of God.

As we are now living during the Dispensation of Grace, its end is not a fact of past history but rather of prophecy, the history of the future. According to the predictive portions of the New Testament, this age is to end in widespread apostasy or falling away from the truth. The result, as given in the Book of Revelation, will be a series of judgments culminating in the end of the present dispensation.

*The Dispensation of the Kingdom.*[15] The last of the dispensations is indissolubly linked with a covenant God made with David. In II Samuel 7: 1-17, we have the record of the incident. David, at peace with all his enemies, desired to honor the Lord by building a suitable temple for the sacred ark. In answer to this desire God sent a message to David through Nathan, the prophet. The gist of it was

[15] Institution: Christ's second coming. Old Testament reference—II Samuel 7: 1-17; New Testament reference—Ephesians 1: 10. Extent: 1,000 years, from Christ's second coming until He delivers the Kingdom up to the Father (I Corinthians 15: 24).

that David should not build the temple, but that the Lord would establish David's son Solomon on the throne and would permit Solomon to construct the temple. Then, as is so often the case in sacred prophecy, the message broadened to universal scope, and the Lord sealed the covenant with these words: "Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." [16] This is the promise of the kingdom, and the seventh dispensation is its divine fulfillment.

Old Testament history tells us, of course, that the immediate posterity of David proved untrue to their sacred trust. Solomon, who began so gloriously, finally turned away from the truth. His son Rehoboam was a misguided weakling and through his utter lack of true leadership alienated the ten tribes of Israel. For a few centuries the Davidic Kingdom of Judah continued, and then, like its rival Israel, it fell prey to the conquering Babylonian and entered a long captivity. Humanly speaking, it seemed as if God had forgotten His solemn covenant with David. Instead of being "established for ever," the kingdom and throne had vanished. Judah, bereft of her sovereign rights as a nation, bowed down to the Gentile overlord.

[16] II Samuel 7:16.

But there was one ray of light. All through the checkered history of the Kingdom, the Davidic dynasty remained intact. This was a fact almost miraculous, when one considers the intrigues and treacheries of those bloody days. During a period more than a hundred years shorter, the neighboring Kingdom of Israel had no less than nineteen dynasties. Judah, the seat of this Davidic line, had one. Consequently, the Davidic dynasty entered the captivity unbroken. Temporarily the covenant was interrupted, but the succession was secure. And thus it remained until a Babe was born in Bethlehem. His genealogy was without question royal. As Matthew [17] informs us, He had an indisputable right to the Davidic throne. For a time the culmination and actual appearing of the covenanted Kingdom was in the hands of His fellow countrymen. Had the first-century Jews truly accepted Christ as their Messiah, the Davidic Covenant would have been fulfilled, the Kingdom set up, and the Kingdom Dispensation would have begun. But it was not thus ordained. Christ was rejected. By the hands of His own nation, the King was crucified. Chosen of God as "King of the Jews," only in the hour of crucifixion did He receive the title bestowed with ironic ridicule by a pagan ruler.

[17] Matthew 1.

Had death conquered and had Christ failed to rise from the dead, the Davidic Kingdom would indeed have proved an empty dream. There is in the familiar words of Paul a wealth of meaning. "If Christ be not risen, then . . . your faith is vain." [18] But Christ *did* rise. The bonds of death could not hold the royal Son of David. He lived on the first Easter day. Nineteen hundred years later He still lives. The conqueror of death, "He ever liveth and maketh intercession for us." In His immortal hands, the Davidic succession is eternally secure.

And so, at the close of this dispensation, the Kingdom will come into its own. The apostasy in the form of a world-wide departure from the faith [19] will be man's answer to God's forbearance and mercy under Grace. Judgments will follow; the Lord will come for His Church, there will be a time of unprecedented trouble and disaster, and finally at Armageddon Christ, described in Revelation as the Rider "on the white horse," [20] will overthrow the rebellious hosts of man. And then will be fulfilled the long-awaited promise. As "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," the divine Rider will enter upon a

[18] I Corinthians 15:14.
[19] II Timothy 3:1-9; II Peter 2.
[20] Revelation 19:11-16.

glorious rule. For a thousand years Christ will occupy the throne of David.

This is the period known as the millennium,[21] the time of blessing of which the prophets sang. It will be signalized in a unique way. Satan will be temporarily restrained and the curse will be lifted from the earth,[22] and there will be unheard-of productivity. Sickness and physical death will be the exception, not the rule. With Christ, the Prince of Peace, as King, wars shall cease, and the long-sought day of universal amity will at last be realized. Even the wild beasts will forget their enmity, and "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . and a little child shall lead them." [23]

But, even under such favorable conditions, evil will persist in the hearts of some. Giving feigned obedience and honor to the King, they will conspire together. At the end of the thousand years, there will be a brief and final flare of evil, Satan being loosed, after which the rebels will be destroyed and Satan cast forever into the lake of fire.[24]

The Dispensation of the Kingdom is over. Heaven and earth flee away. The Great White

[21] Revelation 20: 1-5.
[22] Isaiah 65: 17-25.
[23] Isaiah 11: 6.
[24] Revelation 20: 7-10.

Throne is set up in eternity, and the wicked dead are judged according to their deeds. Then, as the twenty-first chapter of Revelation tells us, is prepared "the new heaven and the new earth." Christ delivers up the Kingdom to His Father,[25] the transition to eternity is complete, and God is all in all. Thus ends God's plan for the ages. How glorious is its scope! How boundless is its sweep! And how wonderful is the truth that all merges and finds fulfillment in our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him Innocency is unbroken, Conscience undisturbed, on His shoulder the Government rests, in Him promise and Law find fulfillment, and His is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever!

[25] I Corinthians 15:24.

## *Chapter Eight*

### GOD'S IMMUTABLE PROMISES

Of like importance to the dispensations are the covenants. If, as we have seen, the dispensations are to be regarded primarily as periods of time during which God tests the obedience of man to a specific revelation of His will, then the covenants may be considered as God's enunciation of those specific revelations under which man is tested. As a sort of plan or chart for this chapter, let us, therefore, first of all sketch out this significant relationship between dispensations and covenants. This plan should be constantly referred to during the reading of the following pages. On one side we shall list the dispensations; on the other the covenants. The order, of course, is chronological. It should be noted that the correspondence in time is not absolute. For instance, the Dispensation of Human Government continues in force through the Mosaic Covenants and indeed overlaps in respect to the Gentile nations some of the later dispensations.

| *Dispensations* | *Covenants* |
|---|---|
| Innocency | Edenic |
| Conscience | Adamic |
| Human Government | Noahic |
| Promise | Abrahamic [1] |
| Law | Mosaic A (Sinai) |
| | Mosaic B (Palestinian) |
| | Davidic A (Instituted) |
| Grace [2] | |
| Kingdom | Davidic B (Consummated) |
| | New |

The meaning of the term "covenant" is perfectly obvious. It is simply another way of saying "promise" or "agreement." One caution, however, must be made as to its application to God's dealings with men. When used in this manner the word has an accommodated sense. In the human covenant, the two covenanting parties contract together regarding certain *mutually* agreeable conditions. But in the divine covenant, from the very nature of the case, man merely receives the terms of the agreement and has nothing to do with fixing these terms. To be

[1] From the time of Abraham the covenants are primarily Jewish.

[2] Grace, being universal and opening the way, spiritually, for the Gentiles, does not have an exact covenantal explanation, as do the other dispensations.

sure, his free will enables him to reject the covenant, divine though it be, but he has no power to change in any way its provisions.

The covenants of God, then, are divine provisions or conditions for the guidance and government of God's people throughout the ages of God's dealings with the race. The fact that they emanate from God makes their terms obligatory rules to be obeyed. Consequently, it is not surprising that blessing attends obedience and judgment disobedience. And it is just here that the peculiar *covenant* character of these divine pronouncements enters in. Along with their absolutely binding authority, they are truly promises. God says in effect to man—"Here are certain provisions for your guidance. Follow them, and blessing and the highest good will attend you. My word is the guarantee of this compact." Indeed, God is actually represented as confirming His covenants by an oath, as is brought out by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews in speaking of the Abrahamic Covenant.[3]

The major covenants, of which there are eight, rank with the dispensations in importance. The dispensations, however, apply in some cases to all men; the covenants are more exclusively Jewish in

[3] "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath." Hebrews 6: 17.

scope. Scripture is God's supernatural revelation to humanity. And of what is it a revelation? The answer obviously is that it is a revelation of God's mind, particularly as regards His purpose toward humanity. And in the covenants we have the great key-statements of that revelation. God spoke to men. He spoke to them progressively. As the ages passed, He spoke again, with wonderful grace and mercy accommodating His edicts to man's needs. The dispensations mark the ages or periods of God's dealings with man; the covenants are God's enunciation of the principles of guidance, judgment, and blessing accompanying these ages. They may be likened to the major points of God's discourse to man. Understand them and you begin to see the logic of the divine mind.

And now, always bearing in mind the corresponding dispensations as shown in our diagram, we may proceed to examine more especially each of the covenants.

*The Edenic Covenant.* First is the Edenic Covenant, stated in Genesis 1:28 and the following verses. This, of course, particularizes the test conditions of the Dispensation of Innocency. God covenants to bless man by giving him sway over the whole earth and its creatures. Man's part of the contract is to fulfill the following responsibil-

ities: 1. To reproduce his own kind so that humanity might dominate the earth. 2. To subdue for humanity's use the earth. 3. To control the animal realm. 4. To subsist upon herbs and fruits. 5. To cultivate the divinely appointed Garden of Eden. 6. The one prohibition is to abstain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Lastly, with this covenant there went a single but awful penalty—death.

The responsibilities fulfilled, man was to enjoy the world and all creation to the glory of God; but were the responsibilities unfulfilled, the sentence of death was to fall.

*The Adamic Covenant.*[4] Next, as explanatory of Conscience, that second great dispensation, is the Adamic Covenant. As it deals with humanity after the first sin in Eden, it lays the great universal basis for the life of man, now a fallen creature, throughout the ages preceding the great consummation of the Kingdom. Thus it contains the conditions under which the race is to live and work until the present world-order changes at the voice of Him who shall say, "Behold, I make all things new."[5]

These conditions, broadly, are as follows: 1. The serpent, utilized as the agent for Satan's malignant

[4] Genesis 3:14-20.
[5] Revelation 21:5.

subtlety whereby man was morally ruined, is cursed. From a most beautiful creature it becomes the loathsome reptile, a perpetual object lesson of the repulsive effects of sin. 2. A glorious hope is held out for the encouragement of the blighted race. The Redeemer is promised. The "seed" of the woman is to bruise the "head" of the serpent.[6] In other words, the poison of sin no sooner infects mankind than God heralds the divine antidote—the only-begotten Son who, though He knew no sin, is "made sin" and suffers the penalty of death that a corrupted humanity might become whole.[7] 3. Woman is

[6] Genesis 3:15.

[7] *Note on Genesis 3: 15.* "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

The monumental importance of this verse has been recognized by commentators from ancient times. Its gospel character is so marked that for centuries it has been known as the "protevangel," *i.e.,* "first gospel," for it is the first hint of the good news. The interpretation, while not fully apparent on the surface, is made plain by common-sense application of the rules of grammar. The matter simply hinges on the pronouns and their logical antecedents. "And I will put enmity . . ." (Who is the antecedent of *I*? Very evidently, God, as we see by reference to verse 14) ". . . between *thee* and the woman . . ." (Who is the antecedent of *thee*? Clearly the serpent, addressed by way of cursing in the preceding verse).

In this simple bit of grammar lies the key to the protevangel. Remembering the antecedents of the pronouns, we continue—"and between *thy* [the serpent's or Satan's] seed [*i.e.,* Satan, the principle and personality of evil] and *her* [the woman's] seed [*i.e.,* Christ, the second Adam, the perfect representative of humanity]; *it* [the woman's seed, or the Redeemer] shall bruise *thy* [the serpent's or Satan's] head [*i.e.,* render Satan a

henceforth to bear unusual suffering through multiplied offspring and the pangs of motherhood. She is also to be under the headship of man. 4. For man's ultimate welfare the earth is cursed, so that only by wholesome, cleansing toil may the essentials of life be wrested from it. The fallen nature of man requires the stabilizing influence of toil. 5. Life is to be marked by inescapable sorrow. 6. The earth being cursed, the light occupation of Eden is changed to unremitting and heavy labor. 7. Physical death is set as the inevitable end of man's days, "few . . . and full of trouble." [8] These, in brief, are the conditions of the Adamic Covenant. That they may be properly understood they must be related to the fact of "man's first disobedience." This disobedience brought with it an experimental knowledge of good and evil, as indeed the name [9] of the forbidden tree suggests. And with the acquisition of this knowledge that universal moral faculty known as "conscience" awoke. Thus the provisions of the Adamic and, in fact, of the succeeding covenants, must be considered in the light of conscience, the great inward compulsion that tells man that he

mortal blow, as indeed Christ did at the resurrection], and *thou* [the serpent or Satan] shalt bruise *his* [Christ's] heel" [*i.e.*, deal a transient blow, as in the crucifixion, after which Christ overcame death].

[8] Job 14:1.

[9] "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

*ought* to do right and that he *ought* to abstain from evil. Although most of the provisions of the Adamic Covenant are in the nature of fixed conditions, yet under it and the subsequent covenants man is responsible to do all known right and to eschew all known evil.

*The Noahic Covenant.*[10] With the failure of man under conscience and its accompanying covenant, a new age is introduced following the cataclysmic judgment of the flood. Dispensationally it is called Human Government; its divine provisions are known as the Noahic Covenant. On that solemn day when the waters of the flood had subsided and all the earth was as fresh as on the morning of creation, God announced to Noah, who with his household was the sole representative of his kind, a new covenant.

1st, the relation of man to the earth as set forth in the Adamic Covenant, was confirmed. 2nd, the uniformity of the great natural cycles of heat and cold, summer and winter, day and night was assured as long as "the earth remaineth." 3rd, all creation was delivered afresh into the hand of man, but to man's original dominion was added the tremendous responsibility of exercising the highest judicial function of government—the taking of life. "Whoso

[10] Genesis 9: 1-19, 25-27.

sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made he man."[11] In short, government, together with its greatest responsibilities, was delivered over to man. These functions, through human government, he was to exercise for God. 4th, to Noah and his household is reiterated the original Edenic command to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth. 5th, as a gracious seal of this great covenant God promised that there will never be another such universal calamity as the flood, confirming this covenant by the beautiful token of the rainbow. 6th, as a final element of this Noahic Covenant God gave a prophetic forecast of the history of the long line of humanity to be descendants of Noah's three sons.

Like so many portions[12] of the early chapters of Genesis, the three terse declarations which make up this sixth provision[13] are of towering significance as the seeds from which future world events spring. Ethnologically they are correct, historically they are true, and religious history follows in their mold. One might well pause to ask where, unless from divine inspiration, the author of Genesis obtained such unerring insight into the ages of the future.

[11] Genesis 9:6.
[12] Cf. Genesis 3:15, for example.
[13] Genesis 9:25-27.

But these three verses ought not to be passed without more careful note of their meaning. "And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." Ham (the father of Canaan) is to be the ancestor of a servile posterity (verse 25). So it has been through history, for, according to ethnology, the negroid races are descendants of Ham. And their lot has been to serve Ham's brethren, the descendants of Shem and Japheth. One may take issue with this, but the fact remains that here we have the mold of history. Furthermore, Christ invested servitude and toil with a new dignity, and to minister to one's brethren is no whit inferior in the sight of God than to rule. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." [14]

In connection with Shem (founder of the great Semitic races to which belong the Jews) God is particularly mentioned. "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem." And to these people was committed, as a sacred torch to be passed on for the illumination of all mankind, the knowledge of Jehovah, the true

[14] I Samuel 16:7.

God. So the chosen people were made the custodians of monotheism, so "the oracles of God" were committed to them, so of their blood the Redeemer of Genesis 3:15, Christ the Lord, was born. Blessed, indeed, be the Lord God of Shem! Dominant though we of the family of Japheth are, yet we derive our knowledge of eternal things from a Semitic book, recording Semitic history; and for the salvation of our souls we must ever trust in the merits of a Semitic Saviour, born in Bethlehem-Judah of the seed of David. "He shall dwell in the tents of Shem."

*The Abrahamic Covenant.* Back in the ninth century before Christ the Moabites and the Ammonites, heathen enemies, invaded the land of Judah. In his desperate strait, Jehoshaphat, the godly king of Judah, prayed for deliverance. He pled in his prayer, which may be found in the twentieth chapter of II Chronicles, that the land of Palestine is Israel's possession; "Thou," he prayed to Jehovah, "gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend forever." Abraham, thy friend! Abraham, the friend of God! The appellation is unique, as is the covenant which we remember by the name of this outstanding follower of Jehovah. Because of the perversity of human nature, the covenants like the dispensations

speak only too often of the failure of humanity. Yet there is a brighter side. In Abraham, we see this brighter side of the covenants. For "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."[15] He was obedient, and ventured all upon faith, following without question the command of Jehovah. And so to Abraham is given this wonderful covenant of promise—given not once but five times, with each reiteration expanded in glory and blessing. If failure to meet the divine commands brings judgment, blessing is equally quick to follow obedience to God. The Abrahamic Covenant is a comforting reminder of this truth. Although his descendants were disobedient, Abraham was obedient in faith. And because of this faith, God graciously rewarded him so generously and so universally that *all* men who believe are with him heirs of the promise.

Abraham's story is familiar. As the record of Genesis 11 shows, he lived with Terah, his father, in Ur of the Chaldees, that ancient city, the glories of which archeology[16] is only now bringing to the notice of the modern world. The divine command came for him to leave the home of his kindred and go forth from his father's house to a land God would

[15] Romans 4: 3.
[16] The University of Pennsylvania Expedition.

show him. "Do this," said God in effect, "and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."[17] In the simple words of the record, "So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him."[18] Afterward, the original promise of blessing was amplified in Genesis 13:16, and Abram learned what God meant when He said that He would make of His servant a great nation. For here the promise is of a posterity as numerous as the dust of the earth. Again[19] God points him to the multitudes of the stars as a figure of the teeming millions who are to spring from him. Yet Abram was an old man without son and heir. Truly there is a deeply moving fidelity in his simple acceptance of God's prodigious promise. And yet once more[20] the covenant of blessing is affirmed, this time with the repeated promise of possession of all the land of Canaan. Here furthermore the seal of the promise is set by means of the sign of circumcision, to be observed down through

[17] Genesis 12:2, 3.
[18] Genesis 12:4.
[19] Genesis 15:5.
[20] Genesis 17:4-22. Here, as a token of fulfillment, God changes the name of Abram (high father) to Abraham (father of many nations).

the ages by Abraham and his natural posterity. And the promise that Abraham is to be the father of many nations is particularized by the definite word that Sarah, the aged wife of Abraham, shall have a son, Isaac by name.

But Abraham's obedience is again tested. An old man, he is commanded to take his beloved son Isaac and sacrifice him to God upon Mount Moriah. With calm confidence in the ultimate goodness of his God, Abraham calls Isaac and sets forth to obey the divine command. The scene, so matchlessly told in Genesis 22, is by no means that of an ignorant zealot setting out to offer a human sacrifice. Rather does it depict a hero of faith trusting in the mercy of his God even in the last extremity, willing to follow the divine purpose though the way be fraught with impossible difficulties. This was the spirit of Abraham's response to the natural query of his son on the mountain top. "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?[21] And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering; so they went both of them together." So Abraham proceeded, knowing that the sacrifice was commanded, seeing no lamb, willing even to offer his only son, yet secure in the faith that God Himself

[21] Genesis 22:7.

would provide a way. And God did provide the lamb, for the Angel of the Lord bade him observe the ram caught in the nearby thicket. So Abraham sacrificed the divinely given substitute in place of his son.

The sequel to this magnificent display of faith rewarded is the final reaffirmation of the covenant of promise to Abraham. Notable is the manner of reaffirmation.[22] And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."[23] The covenant is witnessed, witnessed by an oath of tremendous import. "By myself have I sworn," said God. The Creator, being supreme, can call only Himself to attest His everlasting covenant with Abraham His friend.

[22] It is worthy of note that the covenant is also reaffirmed to Abraham's son, Isaac, and his grandson Jacob. Cf. Genesis 26:1-6; 28:10-15.

[23] Genesis 22:15-18.

So much for the background and institution of the Abrahamic Covenant. Equally illuminating is a summary of its provisions and their glorious fulfillment. First of all, the land was promised to Abraham: This was fulfilled in the Israelitish possession of Canaan. The three dispersions and restorations, all prophesied,[24] but interrupt for a time this immutable promise. In the second place are the blessings having to do more or less directly with Abraham and his seed. These may be listed under seven heads: 1. "I will make of thee a great nation." Naturally, this is fulfilled in the multitude of Abraham's descendants, the Hebrew people, literally through the ages "as the dust of the earth" or "the sands of the sea." Spiritually, this is fulfilled in all Christian believers whether Jew or Gentile. This fact is made clear by Paul's statement in Galatians, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."[25] Perhaps God had in view this spiritual posterity when He pointed Abraham to the stars of heaven. Again, this initial promise is fulfilled in Ishmael who was to become a great nation (the Arab races). 2. "I will bless thee." This was fulfilled temporally and

[24] Cf. Gen. 15:13-16; Jeremiah 25:11, 12, and the Palestinian Covenant.

[25] Galatians 3:29.

actually in Abraham's lifetime.[26] Spiritually it is fulfilled in the fact that Abraham by faith obtained righteousness, and thus shared in the fruits of Christ's work.[27] 3. "And I will make thy name great." That Abraham's name is written large in world-history is incontestable. 4. "And thou shalt be a blessing." The first verse of the Gospel of Matthew presents Christ as the Son of Abraham. The ancestor of the Redeemer is indeed a blessing to all mankind; as Paul has it,[28] "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law . . . that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." 5. & 6. "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." All history attests the truth of these words. Witness the judgment and ruin of the enemies of Israel from Assyria and Babylon down to Russia of today. Witness also the prosperity of the British Empire and America, nations notably fair to their Jewish brethren. 7. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Linked to 4 (above), this again centers in Christ, the great Son of Abraham, whose coming brings universal blessing to all men. Notice the harmony of this with the first evangelical promise in Genesis 3:15. Here the seed of the woman is shown

[26] Genesis 13:14-17; 15:18; 24:34, 35.
[27] Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; John 8:56.
[28] Galatians 3:13, 14.

more definitely to be of the posterity of Abraham. In Him, indeed, through His work of atonement for the sins of the world, are all families of the earth blessed.

*The Mosaic Covenant.* Simultaneously with the Dispensation of the Law, God gave the covenant known by the name of Moses. Moses was a great lawgiver, and this covenant exactly explains the test of the corresponding dispensation under which the Israelites were tried by their obedience to the Law.

In a chapter such as this it is too easy to descend to a mere listing of abstract principles, devoid of the vivid colors of actual life. We might well pause, therefore, to glimpse through the eye of the imagination the majestic circumstances that ushered in the Mosaic Covenant. For legal though this covenant be, its legalism is that of fundamental morality. Far from being entirely abstract, its multitudinous provisions reflect the various hues of life itself. In its religious sections there is a glorious pageantry of worship never to be surpassed for the majesty of its ceremonial.

At the time, then, of the institution of this covenant the hosts of the Israelites were encamped in the midst of the desert peninsula of Sinai. Barely escaped from the vengeance of Pharaoh and his pursuing army, with the marks of haste and flight yet

upon them, they were a varied multitude. There they camped by the hundreds of thousands—warriors, old men, old women, mothers, boys, girls, little children, and with them all manner of servants and beasts of burden, together with hurriedly-snatched personal belongings and the spoil of their oppressors, seized in that memorable night when the destroying Angel stalked through the land of Egypt. There they were, a living monument to the stretched-out arm of their Jehovah. Passed over in the night of death, brought dry-shod through the perilous waters of the Red Sea, fed supernaturally by manna and quail, and guided graciously by the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, their very presence bespoke the greatness of Jehovah. And they were a very "human" multitude, also. Shortsighted and narrow-minded, they complained most bitterly when God was leading them most gloriously. They had their loves and their hates, their heroisms and their cowardices as all other men have had. Perhaps they were too human, for they often tried the patience of their great leader who, to his own spiritual detriment, proclaimed them a stiff-necked, rebellious lot.

There they wait before the towering red mass of Sinai, outlined like a monstrous Throne against the burning glare of the sands and the empty vault of

the sky. How the call came to their leader is not given us to know. The record simply says, "And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain." [29] But what a depth of sublimity undergirds the simple words! God speaks. Moses hears and transmits the word to the elders of the people. They hear and assent. The momentous decision is made, for God has proffered the Law. If the people would obey it, God would make of them "a peculiar treasure" unto Himself "above all people." They would be "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." [30] And so Moses returns to the Mount, bringing the affirmative answer of the people. Then God issues a warning. The people are to be sanctified and made ready for the third day, for on that day the Lord Himself will overshadow with His glory the Holy Mount. But let the record speak. "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was

[29] Exodus 19:3.
[30] Exodus 19:5, 6.

altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice."[31] The modern may criticize and assert that the foregoing narrative is primitive and crude. But he who reads it with the mind of the spirit, he who is in the least responsive to the sublimity of great literature, will, like the waiting multitudes, remain afar off and in awe.

Descending from the mount after the tremendous display of the Lord's might, Moses, as the divine spokesman, enunciated the law. As this constituted the covenant, it would be well to see in what it consisted. It had three parts. 1. The ten commandments,[32] the expression of the holy will of Almighty God. Of their importance as the ultimate foundation of all law and morality it is hardly necessary to speak. 2. The rules for governing the social life of Israel.[33] These were known as the "judgments." They conditioned all the complex social relations of the people, regulated rights of property, and laid the basis for God's people living together. 3. The last

[31] Exodus 19: 16-19.
[32] Exodus 20.
[33] Exodus 21: 1-24: 1.

element of the covenant was the "ordinances."[34] These had to do particularly with the religious life of the people. They provided for the manifold ceremonials of worship, priesthood, sacrifices, and tabernacle. Linked with the ten commandments, they formed the great basis of Judaism, the religion of the Chosen People.

As in the other covenants, so in the Mosaic Covenant judgment attended disobedience but blessing followed obedience. Yet the history of the Jews, sad to relate, is predominantly the record of just penalties imposed for repeated violations of this covenant.

*The Palestinian Covenant.* Further explanatory of the Dispensation of the Law is the Palestinian Covenant. In fact, as shown by the sketch at the beginning of this chapter, it is really another Mosaic Covenant. The statement preceding its institution gives ample warrant for this view. "These are the words of the covenant, which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb."[35] Nevertheless, it is better known as the Palestinian Covenant, because it deals so exclusively with the land of promise. It details the conditions under which Israel entered the land

[34] Exodus 25-31: 12.
[35] Deuteronomy 29: 1.

which had been pledged in the Abrahamic Covenant. Consequently, it is of immense prophetic importance, for Palestine is the stage, not only of the great drama of ancient Hebrew history, but also of the future consummation of world-history as foretold by God's Word.

The conditions of this covenant are seven in number. 1. Dispersion and expulsion from the land will follow disobedience of God's laws. 2. While under the sentence of this dispersion, Israel will repent and turn to the Lord. 3. The ultimate return of the Messiah to the promised land. 4. The restoration of the dispersed Israelites to the land under the kingship of the Messiah. 5. The final conversion of Israel as a nation to Christ, the returned Messiah. 6. The final judgment of Israel's oppressors. 7. The national blessing and prosperity of God's Chosen People, purged through suffering and converted to an acceptance of the only-begotten Son.

Thus briefly stated, the provisions of the Palestinian Covenant are somewhat difficult to grasp as a whole. Related to the great forecast of the prophets, however, these provisions stand out as a mighty panorama of the past and future history of a great people.

*The Davidic Covenant.* During the long centuries covered by the Dispensation of the Law, God

gave still another covenant in explanation of His will. Like the compacts made with Abraham and Moses, this covenant was given to a highly-favored servant of Jehovah. Unlike the Mosaic, yet similar to the Abrahamic Covenant, it has to do primarily with the individual as the head of the nation, although the nation itself shares fully in its provisions.

As Abraham was known as "the friend of God," so David, "a man after God's own heart," had a scarcely less unique title. The seventh chapter of II Samuel sets before us the institution of the covenant which God made with him. David through the Lord's favor rests in his palace at peace with all his enemies. As he contemplates the magnificence which surrounds him, he speaks to Nathan, the prophet, of the discrepancy between the royal dwelling and the tabernacle. The latter was a portable, tentlike structure which housed the sacred Ark of the Covenant round which shone the glory of God. Yet King David lived in "a house of cedar." And so it came to the heart of the impulsive king to build for his God a more fitting temple.

That very night there came through Nathan, the prophet, a message for the King. God did not want David to build a temple. Rather would that task be reserved for Solomon, David's son. Far greater, however, than the distinction of building the temple

was the honor inherent in the Davidic Covenant, which formed the chief portion of Nathan's message from the Lord. This covenant is in the great evangelical line, starting with the protevangel and continuing through the gracious promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. On it the glorious Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be founded. It is essential, therefore, to remember that, while it was given to David during the legal dispensation, it was interrupted by reason of the disobedience of the Chosen People, and thus will not find its actual fulfillment until Christ comes again. Consequently, it appears in two parts on the diagram at the beginning of this chapter, its second part or consummation synchronizing with the Dispensation of the Kingdom.

But the Davidic Covenant demands a closer view. Its provisions are simple but momentous. It establishes a Davidic "house," or family. In connection with this house, the throne is mentioned as indicative of royal authority. So also a Kingdom is named as a place for exercise of royal authority. Finally, all—house, throne, and Kingdom—are established forever. The covenant has but one condition; in the event of disobedience of God's commands, the posterity of David is to suffer chastisement, but never in such a form as finally to annul the covenant.

This condition illuminates a somewhat puzzling phase of the Davidic Covenant. "How," it has been asked, "can one speak of David's throne as being established forever, when, since the time of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, the kingdom has ceased outwardly to exist?" The answer hinges upon the matter of chastisement. Reading the melancholy record of the throne in the books of Kings and Chronicles makes clear the rash disobedience of the majority of David's successors. Consequently, the blow fell. Chastisement came—to interrupt, but not to annul the covenant. The posterity of David were taken into the Babylonian captivity, there to lose for long centuries their national independence. Later, the royal edict of a heathen ruler permitted a remnant to return to the old land, where they remained as the nucleus of the people from which Christ sprang. But the Kingdom was interrupted. In Christ it was, momentarily, reinstated when He was acclaimed on Palm Sunday as the Messiah. Yet the recrudescence was but momentary, for the nation immediately rejected their King,[36] and He was forthwith crucified with His rightful title placed only by the sarcasm of a Roman Governor at the head of a cross of shame.

[36] The Gospel genealogies of Christ are clear proof of His Davidic ancestry and hereditary right to the throne. Matthew 1; Luke 3.

Thus the Davidic Covenant remains in abeyance. But God's oath is immutable. At the Dispensation of the Kingdom the throne will be reëstablished, the Kingdom will come, and Christ will reign on the throne of David, not only as King of His people, but as the acknowledged "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

*The New Covenant.* In the plan of God's Word one book of the New Testament is reserved for a most illuminating comparison. The ordinances of the Old Testament, the sacrifices and the offerings, are explained by relating them to Christ. In every case He is seen to be the divine fulfillment. The laws and ordinances of Judaism had their place, but their higher significance related to Christ, of whom typically they spoke in a thousand different ways. Were it not for the Epistle to the Hebrews, which discharges the functions above stated, Leviticus would be a closed book and much else in the Old Testament obscure.

But not only are the ceremonial ordinances illuminated by Hebrews, but the covenants are summed up in a final comparison with the excellencies of the New Covenant—the culmination of the line of compacts made by God with man through the ages. Fittingly enough, it is the eighth covenant, thus

speaking of a new beginning through the law of numerical symbolism.

Although the comparison is instituted chiefly between the Mosaic and the New Covenants, yet all the preceding covenants are necessarily in view. The great basis of superiority lies not in morality—for all God's covenants are perfect in righteousness and judgment—but in efficacy.

The key to the New Covenant and its superiority lies in the following words: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; *I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts:* and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."[37] Herein is the gracious excellency of the New Covenant. Just and merciful the preceding compacts were, but, so deep in sin was man steeped that the willful corruption of his nature constantly prevented his obedience. He needed, in short, a *new* heart in order to be well-pleasing to God. The Dispensation of Grace, through the atonement, provided a way whereby all men might receive this new heart through the simple acceptance of the Saviour. But the Israelites, to whom the covenants chiefly pertain, have been, since the rejection and crucifixion of their Messiah, blind to the grace of God by reason

[37] Hebrews 8: 10.

of their unbelief.[38] And to insure them the new heart so necessary for acceptance by God, the New Covenant will come into effect at the time when the glorious Dispensation of the Kingdom opens. Into the minds of the rebellious and spiritually blinded Israelites, God Himself will put His laws; into their hearts He will write His commands. Thus they will know their King as Messiah.

More specifically, the points of superiority of the New Covenant are as follows: 1. It is better than its predecessors not morally, but in efficacy. 2. It is better established on *unconditional* promises. Before, God said, "*If* ye will"; now He says, "I will." 3. It is better than the preceding covenants, because obedience to them resulted often from fear of consequences; under the New Covenant obedience springs from the renewed heart and mind. 4. The New Covenant, by putting the laws in the individual's mind and writing them on his heart, secures the personal revelation of the Lord to every one under its provisions. 5. The New Covenant secures the complete effacement and oblivion of sins. 6. It rests upon a finished redemption, not upon a future, incompleted redemption. 7. It consummates the Davidic

[38] In his great parenthesis in Romans (chapters 9 through 11) Paul explains this. Cf. particularly Romans 9:25-33 and 11:7-12.

Covenant by securing the perpetuity, future conversion, and blessing of Israel, thus ushering in the Kingdom.

These, then, are the covenants. They give us a large glimpse into the eternal counsels of God. They deal, to be sure, directly with Israel, but it is nevertheless true that, as in God's promise to Abraham, so in all the covenants *all nations of the earth shall be blessed.*

## *Chapter Nine*

### THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

In the case of a book like the Bible, unique in quality and of admittedly divine inspiration, to assign diverse values to its parts is a task of insuperable difficulty. Yet while the thoughtful scholar shrinks from preferring one portion of God's Word above another, the superficial reader sometimes does what the learned hesitates to attempt. How many professing Christians confine their all-too-desultory Bible reading to familiar chapters of the Gospels and certain of the Psalms. To how many are the great reaches of the historical books, the close-knit logic of the doctrinal epistles, and the vibrant testimony of the prophets a *terra incognita!* No one would dispute the value of the universally known Psalms and Gospel passages. Their appeal is unquestioned, and it is fortunate that in their cases God has chosen to place the nuggets of His truth on the surface. Yet it would be folly to infer that all Bible study is a mere literary placer mining with the gold on surface view. Quite the contrary, some of the most precious

of God's truths lie incrusted with the soil of ancient custom and the rock of Oriental symbolism. For these treasures the earnest reader of Scripture must search. With the sharp pick of the keen intellect and the penetrating drill of the devout spirit he must sink his shaft beneath the outer crust of a bygone literary form, until, like the indefatigable miner, he is rewarded by finding pure gold and precious gems, by revelations of divine truth and glimpses into the eternal counsels of the Almighty, inestimable in value and unfading in beauty. Such, figuratively expressed, is prophetic study. Never popular among the rank and file of church members, its difficulties are arduous and its rewards great.

No book on Bible study that would lay claim, however modestly, to adequacy and comprehensiveness can neglect the unique field of prophecy. The mere extent of this portion of divine revelation is impressive evidence of its importance. Out of sixty-six books, seventeen are throughout prophetic in theme, covering about two hundred and twenty of the ten or eleven hundred pages of Scripture, as commonly printed. This, however, is but the surface extent of prophecy. Many other books, generally accounted non-prophetic, are, to revert to our former figure, richly veined with prophetic truth.

Almost the majority of the Psalms, sections of the epistles and of the historical books, many sayings of our Lord Himself, bear heavy lodes of prophecy. Surely the all-wise Author has written these things for our instruction, not for our bewilderment or neglect. Indeed, one may well infer from the fact that so much of Scripture is run in the prophetic mold, a challenge to the spiritual faculties of humanity.

But just what is this prophecy that bulks so large in God's Word? The answer depends upon understanding a group of men who, with the exception of a few of the apostles and Christ, their greatest Exemplar, lived more than two thousand years ago. Like all great literature, prophecy is the outgrowth of life, the undying expression of kindling feeling and heroic action. While its outward form often bears the marks of human genius, it owes its qualities of spiritual grandeur and unerring foresight entirely to contact with the Spirit of God. As Peter says, "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." [1] This accords well with the original Hebrew term for prophet. The word is "nabî," and it is derived from a verb which, according to competent etymologists, connotes "bub-

[1] II Peter 1:21.

bling forth like a fountain." A key to the meaning of "nabî" is found in Exodus 4:16. Moses, called of God to lead out his people from Egyptian bondage, pleads his inability to appear before Pharaoh because of lack of natural eloquence. To this God replies that Aaron will be the "nabî," or "spokesman," of Moses. "And he [Aaron] shall be thy spokesman ["nabî"] unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God." This early use of the term clearly defines its meaning; the prophet is one who announces or pours forth the counsels of God. In the words of Augustine, the prophet is nothing else unless the enunciator of the words of God to men. And notice the relation of the prophet to his master. He is but the mouthpiece, the spokesman. It is through the Spirit of God that he is moved and borne along. Let those who will cavil at the verbal inspiration of Scripture. The fact is incontrovertible that the prophetic writings are inspired in actual detail. Scores and even hundreds of times the prophets cry out "Thus saith the Lord," "The Word of the Lord came unto me." St. John in his great apocalypse wrote not his own imaginings, but what the glorified and victorious Christ commanded him to write. Nothing is more clear than that the prophetic authors had an unshakable

consciousness of the divine origin of their message. It was this conviction that endowed them with superhuman courage and enabled them to withstand unparalleled persecution. They knew that they spoke not according to the will of man, but that they pronounced the very words of God Almighty.

Two other words, less commonly used, designate in Hebrew the prophet. Both "röéh" and "chozéh" are rendered "seer." Their meaning illuminates the mission of the prophet. For, in the process of enunciating the declarations of God, he saw the future, glimpsing through the divine words or direct visions vouchsafed him the course of distant ages. Thus he was rightly called a seer. Inspiration strengthened his vision, so that his gaze transcended the bounds of time. The world has known other prophets. Other religions have had their seers. The Greeks and Romans had their oracles. But at best their forecasts were ambiguous. Indeed it can safely be asserted that only in the Bible is prophecy reduced to a certainty rather than a shrewd guess. Only the Biblical prophets actually foretold the future with definite detail. Later we shall find occasion to treat more directly of this phase of prophecy. Suffice it to say now that the fulfilled prophecy of Scripture is unique and constitutes an unanswerable evidence of the supernatural inspiration of the Bible. And it

may be that in God's plan of authorship prophecy was for this reason accorded such a large place. For through it the Bible contains *within itself* the accredited evidence of its own authenticity.

It is in relation to this wonderful faculty of foretelling the future, however, that prophecy is commonly misunderstood. The misconception lies in a popular tendency to consider the prediction as the whole of the prophetic office. Prophecy, to be sure, is pre-written history, but it is also much more. To the people of his own time the prophet exercised a distinctive office. He was sent not alone to make known the future. He came as the zealous agent of reform, reproof, and instruction. With current abuses and besetting iniquities he was vitally concerned. His mission, then, was first of all local, contemporary, directed toward the alleviation of present-day evil or the warning forecast of future retribution.

This moral and deeply practical aspect of prophecy is important, although sometimes overlooked by earnest students of prediction. Nevertheless, according to such an accepted definition as that in the Scofield Reference Bible, "Prophets were men raised up of God in times of declension and apostasy in Israel,"[2] this aspect is clearly implied. John the

[2] Introduction to the Prophetical Books.

Baptist, for instance, is a splendid example of the prophetic office. His message was without doubt from God. It was a message of dramatic intensity and immediate application, calling men to repent and be baptized because of the nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven. There you have the combined elements of prophecy—the local, urgent call to reform; the predictive statement of the future event. Or consider our Lord himself, the One who united in a single divine Personality the threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King. How often did He not, through parable as well as direct statement, call for the present change of heart, the sincere repentance of the erring soul, and at the same time speak of the judgments of the future! What is true of John the Baptist and of our Lord holds equally for the Old Testament prophets. In their day their messages were of similarly burning import. They too called the sinners to repentance and denounced social wrong. They too pointed toward the future and foresaw the coming day of judgment and of glory.

Were one to emphasize one single principle as essential to the understanding of prophecy, it would be this principle of twofold application—the local and universal aspects of the message. To lack of comprehension of this principle most of the mis-

understanding of prophecy is traceable. The local and the universal messages, often woven together in the prophet's words, are entangled by the interpreter, and the result is confusion.

Let us, in order to clarify this important generality, analyze a concrete illustration. The first nine verses of the seventh chapter of Isaiah's prophecy put before the reader a certain bit of international intrigue, ominous for the future of the Royal House of David, the dynasty which, according to the Davidic Covenant, was to be established forever. The time is about 742 B.C. Ahaz, a weak king cursed with the tendency to compromise with the abominations of the heathen, sits upon the throne of David and reigns over Judah. Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah, ruler of the rival Jewish kingdom of Israel, confederate to overthrow the Davidic kingdom. At the news that powerful Syria is allied with Israel to work his downfall, Ahaz is smitten with terror. Isaiah expresses his feeling in a phrase of marvelous suggestive power, "And his heart was moved and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." At this time of crisis the Lord calls His prophet Isaiah to action. "Meet Ahaz by one of the royal reservoirs," is the command. "Tell him not to fear because of the threatening alliance between Syria and Israel; even though their plot is to

overthrow the Davidic house and place upon the throne an alien upstart, be not afraid. For thus said the Lord, 'These schemes shall fail. Within sixty-five years Israel will be broken so that it be no longer a nation.' "[3] This, in effect, was the message given Isaiah for this crisis in national affairs. Of its urgent local bearing and Isaiah's patriotic mission there can be no doubt.

But note the immediate sequel, recorded in the text without a break. Isaiah goes on to record the words of the Lord to Ahaz. "Ask," says God to the King, "a sign. Ask it either in the depth, or in the height above." But Ahaz, lacking faith, demurs. "I will not ask," he replies, "neither will I tempt the Lord." Consequently, Ahaz loses the high privilege of personally receiving from the Lord a sign or confirmation of the promise of deliverance. Yet, because the safety of the Davidic house was linked forever to the integrity of God's covenant, the Lord does proclaim a sign, not to Ahaz merely, but to the entire house of David. Then comes the glorious promise of the Virgin-born Redeemer, Immanuel. "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Butter and honey

[3] This prophecy was fulfilled when the ten tribes of Israel were taken into captivity by the Assyrians (about 722 B.C.) and dispersed to be lost until this day.

shall He eat, that He may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." [4]

As there can be no doubt of the local and immediate character of Isaiah's divinely commanded message to Ahaz, so there can be no question of the universal quality of its sequel as recorded by the same great prophet. The faithless King is submerged in the entire house of David. The suggested sign of reassurance becomes the magnificent promise of Immanuel, the Virgin's Son, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This, then, is one example of the juxtaposition in which we find the local and the universal or predictive elements of prophecy. Let us now turn to another illustration of this frequent and puzzling feature of prophecy.

A generation or so before Isaiah, Joel brought to Judah a message based upon a strange phenomenon of nature. The land was plagued by the seventeen-year locusts, a visitation which, whenever experienced in all its intensity, startles man with the realization of his comparative powerlessness in the face of the insect hordes. According to the first

[4] Isaiah 7: 14-16.

chapter of Joel's brief book, that particular visitation must have been terrifying in the extreme. The invading locusts ate their voracious way across the land, leaving behind them stark desolation. Every blade of grass, every bit of green was consumed by their busy teeth. So ruthless were they in their destruction that the very bark was stripped from the trees, leaving the mere bleached skeletons of once beautiful and fruitful foliage. It is this unparalleled disaster to a land dependent upon the produce of the soil that Joel rises up to lament. In inspired cadences he paints an unforgettable picture of the locust plague. He has, in short, responded to a crisis in the life of his time. His mission is to be the spokesman for the sorrow and horror welling in the hearts of his countrymen. Even more, his mission is not only to memorialize the catastrophe, but to point out its significance as an act of God's just chastening of a sinful nation.

But suddenly the emphasis of Joel's message shifts. In the destruction wrought by the insect plague, Joel discerns the still vaster destruction of the Day of the Lord, the future time of the Lord's appearance in might and great glory when the rebellious world powers will be smitten with a "rod of iron" in the final crossing of swords at Armageddon. The locusts themselves become symbols of a greater plague,

the hosts of evil who at the last days will invade Palestine there to do battle with the army of the Lord. They are described as horsemen, running like mighty men, climbing the walls as men of war. As they come they shall spread desolation and terror, but the Lord with His army shall meet them.

Then, pausing to make practical application of the future truth, Joel calls upon all the dwellers in the land that is so sorely smitten with the locust plague and that is to suffer many more grievous burdens and be the scene of momentous events—upon these inhabitants he calls for repentance. For the Lord, he reminds the people, will be merciful. He will give them food and drink. He will drive the invaders away and will overthrow their forces. The desolated crops and pastures will again be fruitful. That which the locust has eaten will be restored. Deliverance will come not only immediately but also in the time of future persecution.

In fact, so great will be the blessing that in the last days there will be a notable bestowal of God's Spirit upon His children. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out

my Spirit."[5] It was these significant words that Peter quoted at Pentecost, that day of supernatural power when God poured out upon the waiting Christians His Spirit, and the church was founded.[6] Although Peter rightly saw in the events transpiring before him a fulfillment of this great promise, it is clear from Joel's context that there is yet to come a fulfillment of his words as they relate to Israel.

In a brief flash of insight into the future, Joel next sees the miraculous signs accompanying the Day of the Lord. Then, again heralding deliverance for Israel, he predicts the judgment of the Gentile nations and describes the Day of the Lord afresh and at length, closing his prophecy with an eloquent preview of the coming Kingdom when Israel will be restored to blessed relationship with her God.

Such, in brief outline, is the prophecy of Joel. In its intermingling of present and future, in its practical exhortations based on coming events, it is typical of the prophetic manner of speaking. Other examples could be multiplied—Daniel, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Haggai, John's great apocalypse, the Lord's remarkable predictive discourses; all prophets and prophecy, in fact, exhibit the same admixture of messages of local with messages of universal im-

[5] Joel 2:28-29.
[6] Acts 2:17-21.

port. Indeed, the unity of prophetic Scripture is one of its most apparent features and a strong proof of its divine inspiration.

It is but natural that questions should now arise regarding the prophetic message in general. What is its great theme or themes? What is its purpose? Like most important questions having to do with the Bible, these are answered by Scripture itself. We find the reply in the last book of the Bible, the Revelation. John, lifted out of himself by the overshadowing Spirit of God, beholds the consummation of the mystery of the ages—the marriage of the Church, the redeemed Bride, to the Lamb, the redeeming Christ. Overcome by the vision of glory, John falls down to worship his heavenly guide, but is deterred from this mistaken homage by the words of the angel: "See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."[7] In this last clause of the angel's warning to John is the key to the prophetic message. In other words, *the vitalizing factor of prophecy, its underlying spirit, is to testify of Jesus.* It is well in considering this truth to look back to the original meaning of the name of our Lord. Jesus means "Saviour." The testimony of the Saviour, the story

[7] Rev. 19: 10.

of salvation, then is the central theme of prophecy. How well this accords with the words of our Lord himself! Following His healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, the Saviour delivers one of those profound discourses which gives John's Gospel its peculiar value. To authenticate His weighty words, Christ calls on four witnesses, the first three being John the Baptist, the miracles, the Father—the last being the Scriptures. Of these He speaks as follows: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." [8] The significance is evident; according to the statement of the Lord Jesus Himself, the Scriptures testify of Him, the Saviour. And for that cause, man is charged with a solemn imperative to "search" the Word of God with the supreme object of finding therein His Lord.

This "search" is the most rewarding and interesting phase of Bible study. Indeed, it may safely be said that all such study to be fruitful must bear either directly or indirectly on the discerning of Christ in the pages of Scripture. To suppose, then, that Christ may be found only in the books that treat fully and more or less contemporaneously of Him, such as the Gospels and the remainder of the New Testament, is an error which, if persisted in,

[8] John 5:39.

will immeasurably impoverish Bible study. For "the testimony of Jesus" is spread throughout the entire Scriptures. There is not a book of the Old Testament that does not, either directly or in type, show forth the Christ.

Let us, in order to make clear this central theme of prophecy, consider some traces of "the testimony of Jesus" in the Old Testament. The very first book of Scripture is extraordinarily rich in Messianic[9] prophecy. Not only in the initial chapter but even in the opening verse, one can discern the Redeemer. For scholars have noted that the designation for God in the original Hebrew of Genesis 1:1 is a noun of the uni-plural type. Consistent with this is such a statement as occurs in Genesis 1:26. "And God said," writes Moses, "let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness." A similar use of the plural in connection with the words of God is found in the divine comment on the proud effort of man expressed in the tower of Babel. "Go to, let *us* go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."[10] There is in these plurals more than rhetorical emphasis and their use is not akin to the bombastic "we" and "our" of the earthly potentate. Rather are they a

[9] From Messiah, the Hebrew term for the coming Christ.
[10] Genesis 11:7.

wonderful foreshadowing at the very dawn of history of the triune nature of God. For God is one God, yet, through the deep and holy mystery of the Trinity, He is manifest in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thus the use of the plural forms in recording His first words to man is wholly justified and in harmony with His wonderful nature, as yet unrevealed. Thus also Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, is seen at the very outstart of Scripture.

The above instance is like the tiny gleam that announces to the anxious mariner the lighthouse miles across the troubled sea. Shining down the centuries and millenniums of human history it points to the One whom Malachi, the last of the Messianic prophets, called "the Sun of righteousness."[11] But the gleam of Genesis 1 very soon becomes a brighter beam, then a flashing ray, and finally the effulgence of the Sun, Himself.

Let us continue to follow it, as it waxes brighter through the pages of God's book. Genesis 3:15 marks the first definite statement of the coming Redeemer. In connection with the Adamic Covenant we have already explained[12] the exact meaning of this protevangel. Yet we may well pause to

[11] Malachi 4:2.

[12] The student should turn to the treatment of the Adamic Covenant in Chapter VIII of this book.

note the eloquent comment of Dr. Alfred Edersheim[13] on the verse. "It is," this great Oxford scholar says of Genesis 3:15, "the noblest saying that could be given to Humanity, or to individual men, at the birth of their history. In it the Bible sets forth at its very opening these three great ethical principles on which rests the whole Biblical teaching concerning the Messiah and His Kingdom: that man is capable of salvation; that all evil springs from sin, with which mortal combat must be waged; and that there will be a final victory over sin through the Representative of Humanity." Dr. Edersheim is right. Here, at the very beginning of Scripture, compressed in twenty-eight simple words, is the central teaching of God's Word. Here, with marvelous condensation is stated the philosophy of salvation, the regenerating truth that is to redeem a sinful world. Well is the verse known as the "protevangel" or "first good news," for it carries *in germ* everything that is later fulfilled regarding the Son of Man. In the words of the great Luther, "Here rises the sun of consolation." Here indeed, simultaneously with the first sin, is the divine provision of the sovereign cure for all who suffer from the primal taint of rebellion against God.

[13] Cf. *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah,* by Alfred Edersheim.

The Abrahamic Covenant, as has already been shown in an earlier chapter, points unmistakably to Christ. "In thee," said God to Abraham, "shall all families of the earth be blessed." [14] How incredible the statement to the wandering Abraham venturing forth into the unknown! Yet it was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, the great descendant of Abraham. In Him truly all families, all nations, all peoples of the earth have been, are, and will be blessed. He alone is the hope of humanity. Through Him alone is God's Grace available for a fallen race. He only is the way, the truth, and the life. "For," as Paul so rightly said, "There is . . . one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." [15]

But the book of Genesis is full of Messianic prophecy. Though writing history, Moses also recorded prophecy. Indeed, merely from the types in Genesis, the silent witness of the lives of men such as Enoch and Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, one can discern a representative portrait of the Christ.

Before passing to prophets later than Moses, however, we must take notice of the patriarch Jacob's dying words to his son Judah. Calling his twelve sons together, Jacob gave each his blessing, the bless-

[14] Genesis 12:3.
[15] I Timothy 2:5.

ings being prophetic of the future of each as representative of the twelve tribes. On his son Judah, Jacob bestowed a most significant blessing[16] with a definitely Messianic trend. Judah, in keeping with his name, which means "praise," is to be honored by his brethern; his father's children will bow down before him. In short, the house of Judah is to lead the other tribes. "Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies" is a clear statement of supremacy over opponents, especially those outside the company of the brethren. "Judah is a lion's whelp." The lion being the king of beasts, this phrase is again prophetic of sovereignty for Judah, a prophecy unmistakably shown by the next verse. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Thus Judah is to be the royal tribe, possessor of the scepter, and the lawgiver until "Shiloh" (probably meaning "Peaceable" or "one who is sent") comes. "Shiloh" may be a Messianic name and points to Christ. The prophetic blessing closes with the mention of wine and milk, typical of the fruitfulness and prominence of the tribe.

The reference of this whole passage to the Lord Jesus Christ has been recognized by commentators

[16] Genesis 49:8-12.

from the earliest times. Indeed, John two thousand years later refers to it in the Revelation, for he sees Christ enthroned as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah."[17] As for history, it gives abundant evidence of the supremacy of Judah. One of the historical miracles of the Old Testament is the preservation of the identity of the throne of Judah amid treachery, war, and captivity. The rival kingdom of Israel had no less than nineteen dynasties; Judah has but one, the divinely-appointed Davidic house.

But the tone of Jacob's blessing being so very definitely regal, one may well pause to ask how it can be applied to a Messiah who neither reigned nor legislated, but who hung instead upon a cross of shame, repudiated publicly and irrevocably by His own brethren. Surely at the crucifixion Christ's brethren neither praised Him nor bowed down before Him. The objection is well worth consideration, and leads us to another distinction fundamental to an understanding of prophecy.

It was John in the Revelation who spoke of Christ as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." Yet it is John again who quotes the Baptist's striking designation of Christ as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."[18] The two phrases are at op-

[17] Revelation 5:5.
[18] John 1:29.

posite poles; there is a vast difference between a lamb and a lion. Yet the phrases are in harmony, for they are supplemental. The Lamb shows Christ as Saviour; the Lion points to Him as King. In other words, prophecy gives a twofold picture of Christ—first, the King, strong and mighty; then, the Saviour, meek and lowly. Or, as the contrast is frequently expressed, prophecy shows Christ in humiliation and then in glory. In the predictive writings of the Old Testament these two aspects of the Messiah as suffering and again as reigning are closely interwoven.

But why this intimate admixture of diverse strains of truth? The query leads us back to the eternal purposes of the Almighty, "the deep things of God," [19] to use the Pauline phrase. Touched with divine mercy, God provided a Saviour for the sin of man. That Saviour was the Christ, the Messiah of royal descent. He it was who should sit upon David's Throne in accordance with the unchangeable covenant. All this was prewritten in sacred prophecy. Holy men of God, moved by the Spirit, recorded these facts centuries in advance. And the Messiah came. Virgin-born, of the seed of Abraham and the line of David, He came as the prophets had written. But He was rejected! As John has it in a

[19] I Corinthians 2:10.

verse of infinite tragedy, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."[20] Blinded by sin, proud in their own conceit, the Jews, the chosen race, spurned Him with a hatred voiced in the terrible cry with which they answered Pilate, "His blood be on us, and on our children,"[21] and expressed in the shame of the crucifixion. The Messiah had come and had been cast out by the very race whom in the plan of God He was to rule.

And God knew in advance of the Messiah's rejection. He foresaw the hostile attitude of His brethren, the indignities that were heaped upon Him, the deep humiliation of the Cross. Foreseeing it all, He wrote it into the prophetic record. Grieving at the shameful treatment of His matchless Emissary, God caused His prophets to tell in detail the very excesses of cruelty with which the enemies of Christ thought to erase Him from the pages of their national life. And God's forevision was correct, for His Word *is* truth. As the prophetic word states, Christ was "despised and rejected of men."

Thus it is that side by side with the prophecy of a kingly Messiah we have the forecast of a suffering Saviour. Thus it is that all will be fulfilled. He who suffered and was rejected is coming again to

[20] John 1:11.
[21] Matthew 27:25.

reign. God's covenant regarding the Messiah as King will be honored. Though He was crucified, dead and buried, He yet arose from the dead and will return, a mighty King, to judge the quick and the dead.

Having seen Christ in Jacob's blessing as the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," let us now gaze upon Him as the "Lamb of God." Each picture is essential for building up the portrait of the real Christ. A thousand years before Christ lived upon the earth David wrote many of the Psalms, among them the twenty-second. No more remarkable piece of literature can be found in the libraries of the world than this prophetic poem. It is a description of death by crucifixion set down by a pen so vivid that one can assign its realism only to personal experience. Its first words are the very gasp of anguish uttered by our Saviour on the Cross. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Then follow in a few penetrative phrases the depths of humiliation to which the Son of Man was subjected. "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." The physical pains of crucifixion—the dis-

location of the joints, the thirst, the shame—all the excruciating agony of this most barbarous death are next expressed. "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me." And this, one must remember, was written by David one thousand years before the event. "A mere coincidence," says the superficial critic. Hardly, for historians tell us that crucifixion was for the Jews of David's time unknown. It remained for Roman brutality to make common use of this degrading torture. Again, hardly a coincidence, because of the perfect verisimilitude of detail. Notice, for instance, verse eighteen. "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." Mark says, describing the crucifixion, "And when they had crucified Him, they parted His garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take."[22] The other three evangelists also note the detail, Matthew and John stating that thus was the prophecy fulfilled.

[22] Mark 15:24.

Who will make bold to say that this, together with the whole tenor of the Psalm, is coincidence? What did the rough Roman soldiers know of David and the ancient Hebrew Psalms? What interest had they in a Messiah? Indeed, they neither recognized Him nor had any interest in recognizing Him, but, callous to the sufferings of the crucified victims, grossly amused themselves with gambling for the discarded garments.

Such details, however, by no means exhaust the prophetic significance of this wonderful Psalm. It must be read in its entirety after its phrases have been searched with a devout spirit. For David has set down the very thoughts of the Son of Man as He suffers the penalty for the sin of the world. Overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, for what he wrote was far above the reach of his own intellect, he writes a poem that affords a fleeting glimpse into that holiest of holies—the heart of the dying Saviour.

One of the leading characteristics of prophetic Scripture is its harmony. Such a passage as we have just examined does not stand alone. Rather is it surrounded by the corroborative witness of different prophets of different ages. Isaiah, for instance, offers in his fifty-third chapter an equally striking picture of the suffering Messiah. Yet he writes nearly three

centuries after David. Very beautifully he describes the sorrows of the Lamb of God. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth."[23] These are memorable words. They are fulfilled exactly in the crucifixion of our Lord. While David seems to describe the actual physical sufferings, Isaiah is concerned with pointing out the significance of this torment as comprehended in the fact that the Messiah was suffering in behalf of others, and that He died in our stead, not for His own iniquity. But like David's forecast of the pas-

[23] Isaiah 53:3-7.

sion of Christ, Isaiah's prophecy is marked also for accurate detail of the far-off event. He speaks of the humiliation which the Messiah suffered. He mentions the stripes that were laid upon His unresisting back by the Roman scourge. He points out His quiet in the hour of accusation. "But He answered him nothing," [24] says Luke of Christ before Pilate. Most striking of all, however, is Isaiah's prevision of a detail of the burial of the Messiah. "And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death." Matthew, recounting the burial of Christ, tells how "there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph . . . He went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus . . . And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb . . ." [25] And, as in the case of David's prediction of the gambling soldiers, all four of the Gospels agree in their mention of this detail, foreseen so definitely by Isaiah more than seven hundred years before.

So much for fulfilled prophecy. God's book, however, is not dead, but living, and one must remember that the working out of the divine plan of the ages is not yet complete. Consequently much of proph-

[24] Luke 23: 9.
[25] Matthew 27: 57-60.

ecy still awaits fulfillment. While this is true of portions of the Old Testament predictions, it holds especially for New Testament prophecy. When Christ said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also," [26] He was clearly speaking of a future event, an event even now unfulfilled. He had in mind that phase of His second coming when, as Paul describes the scene in Thessalonians,[27] "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout" and those who are alive at the time of His coming will be gathered at once to be with Him, being in an instant metamorphosed from mortality to immortality, the dead in Christ having risen first in obedience to the trumpet call. Thus again much of the book of Revelation is unfulfilled prophecy. Its elaborate and striking symbolic pictures of the consummation of God's plan for the world follow closely the mold of our Lord's Olivet Discourse, the greatest single bit of prophecy in the Bible.[28] So too certain passages in the Epistles, such as Paul's second letter to Timothy and Jude's brief but important Epistle, in their prophetic admonition of the coming apostasy picture with startling vividness the present widespread denial of

[26] John 14:2, 3.
[27] I Thessalonians 4:13-17.
[28] Matthew 24, 25.

the Faith. Indeed, we have in these cases an example of the fulfillment of prophecy in our own times. And they are by no means unique. The close student of international affairs who knows his Bible sees prophecy fulfilled in the daily papers. Recent press accounts, for instance, of Zionistic activities in Palestine are fully in accord with the Old Testament Scriptures, which speak of the ultimate return of the Jews to their land, first in unbelief and finally in acceptance of their King. It is the return in unbelief that we see in the Zionistic movement.

But enough examples have been cited to show the nature of prophecy and to make clear its great purpose. Once the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ stands out as the central theme of prophecy is grasped with all its implications, the treasures of the prophetic word are within reach. Other themes there are in prophecy: the history of the Jews, the fate of the great nations of antiquity, the religious conditions and the international alliances of the future—all these have their place. Yet they are each of them subsidiary to the great unifying theme of the Messiah, for they derive from Him their permanent significance. The Jews were chosen as the bearers of God's unique revelation, and of their race Christ was to come. Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and

the other nations of antiquity have a place in prophecy only as instruments used by God in the divinely appointed history of His people. Future conditions are reported in prophecy as they relate to the coming again of Christ. For He is the center of it all, and in Him all things will be gathered.

That this should be the case is but fitting. According to John, Christ was "in the beginning" with God.[29] He had an active part in the great work of creation and now abides in everlasting unity with the Father. According to Paul, "by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things and by Him all things consist . . . that in all things He might have the preëminence." [30]

To the preëminence of the divine Son of God prophecy makes an essential contribution. Its infallibly accurate prediction of scores and hundreds of details from the exact place and unique manner of Christ's birth to His atoning death and His future Kingdom constitutes an unanswerable authentication of His claims as the Saviour of the World. Whoever would reject the Son of Man must reckon

[29] John 1:1, 2.
[30] Colossians 1:16-18.

with this great fact of fulfilled prophecy. Until Messianic prophecy be rationally explained, the supremacy of Christ will remain unshakable. The supernatural prophecies are the credentials of the supernatural Christ. "For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy."

## *Chapter Ten*

### SOME LAWS OF SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION

It was Sir Francis Bacon, greatest among English philosophers, who made the classic observation regarding books and reading. "Some books," said he, "are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some are to be read only in parts, others to be read, but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly and with diligence and attention." There is little doubt as to which group the Bible belongs. It is manifestly one of those books "to be chewed and digested." It requires rereading, then another reading, then a fourth reading, and then rereading times innumerable. And still its message is not exhausted. Constant use and endless familiarity, the acid test of literature as of all art, confirm its worth. Those who know it best invariably love it most dearly. And the world has yet to see a sincere student of Scripture who, no matter what his height of intellect and scholarly attainment, has dared claim mastery of the entire Bible

or even complete understanding of its main theme. The depths of its truth transcend the penetrative power of the finest mind. No man can sound the profundity of God's thoughts. Yet on the other hand the way of salvation is written plain and clear, so that even the simplest can grasp the meaning, though the wise may not understand all the eternal implications.

The Bible is a book with a purpose. It was not written for entertainment or recreation, as is fiction. It was not given to call from the silence of the past the hosts of forgotten ages, as in the case of history. Neither can its aim be said to be æsthetic or critical, as in poetry or belles-lettres. To be sure, one may read it for recreative enjoyment, for historical information, or for æsthetic stimulation, but he who seeks no more than this in its pages is pathetically blind to its chief glory. The purpose of the Bible is the highest any book could have. From beginning to end it aims solely to acquaint man with God. This it does by a progressive revelation of God's character manifested in beneficent action in behalf of man. The Bible stands out as primarily a book of deeds, not theories. Containing no elaborate philosophical proofs for the existence of Deity, it postulates Him in its first sentence and thereafter proceeds to reveal Him as the vigilant, just, and loving Father,

active in planning salvation for erring humanity even unto the sacrifice of His Own Son.

It follows, therefore, that the Christian is obligated to do far more than to read. Here are facts, vital facts that concern the eternal destiny of the immortal soul. Some seem comparatively simple in meaning; others are obscure. Taken as a whole they are the raw material for devout thought or interpretation. They must be seen in their relation one to another and their permanent significance apprehended. Indeed, true Bible study or interpretation cannot but be inductive, in that it draws general principles from a careful consideration of particular instances.

Needless to say, men have differed in their interpretation of Scripture. Conflicting systems of theology bear witness to this fact. How far these differences result from erroneous methods of study is another question. The obligation, however, for the individual Christian to endeavor to interpret what he reads is clear. For the Bible is the daily guide of the believer. As the Psalmist memorably puts it, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."[1] The figure is a practical one. It is said that in the bygone days of the Psalmist, streets and highways were so pitted with holes and

[1] Psalms 119:105.

obstructed with debris that to go abroad in the dark was dangerously unsafe. Consequently, a servant carrying a lantern would precede the traveler at night. Just so the Word of God is a lamp to the feet and a light to the path of the soul journeying through the darkness of the world. Without this guiding beacon spiritual progress is impossible. But how does one use the Bible as a light? Mere reading is hardly enough. Study and interpretation are necessary, if guidance is to be obtained for the practical problems of life.

The experience of Bible scholars has shown that there are certain laws of interpretation which, if followed, will do much to guard against misinterpretation. Common sense confirms the reasonableness of these laws. For the purposes of this chapter these will be stated as seven in number.

*The Law of Spiritual Discernment.* A great poet expressed in lasting form this primary law of interpretation when he wrote the following sentence: "The Bible without the Spirit is a sundial by moonlight." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for the aphorism is his, was not only a great poet but also one of the most acute literary critics England has produced. There is a wealth of meaning in his simple sentence of ten words. Indeed, had it been heeded in the past and were it followed in spirit by present-day

interpreters, misreadings of the divine message and conflicts of theology would be far less. For the truth so vividly expressed by Coleridge is the *sine qua non* of all real Scripture interpretation. "The Bible without the Spirit is a sundial by moonlight." To catch the force of the statement one needs to reflect momentarily upon the sundial. What is the sundial? Merely an ornament for one's garden? Such indeed it is today, when accurate clocks and watches are in universal use. But before the days of mechanical timepieces the sundial was far more than an ornament, beautiful as many ancient examples are. Its purpose was to tell the time. And it could fulfill this purpose only when the sun shone upon it. The soft beams of the moon might have greatly enhanced the beauty of a sundial, but only an ignoramus would have endeavored to tell time by a sundial in moonlight.

So it is with the Bible. A book of supreme beauty, it has like the sundial one great purpose which justifies its existence. It deals not in the time of a finite world but in the eternal values of an infinite universe, pointing man the way to reconciliation with the everlasting God and thus fitting him for the timeless life of eternity. Read it in the moonlight of literary appreciation or study it by the searching lamp of historical analysis, and its beauties and

worth stand revealed. Yet these lights do not enable it to fulfill its high purpose. One may revel in its marvelous diction and master its historical values and still remain as ignorant of its chief aim as the heathen who has never heard its name. For the proper light must play upon its pages. No earthly beams can suffice to throw into clear relief its unchanging message of salvation. Not even the white light of genius can bring out its message. Only the pure ray of the Spirit of God directed upon Scripture as the believer reads and ponders its pages can make plain its purpose.

In his first Corinthian epistle, Paul states the Law of Spiritual Discernment with characteristic power. Emphasizing the point that the Christian revelation transcends human wisdom, the great apostle continues as follows: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit. . . But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolish-

ness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."[2]

Paul's point is clear. He whom he calls "the natural man"[3] cannot understand the things of God. It is only the Spirit of God who reveals the divine wisdom which is found in the Bible. This wisdom is inaccessible to the natural man, for it is "spiritually discerned." The apostle's logic is irrefutable. The natural man comprehends natural, *i.e.,* worldly, things. His spiritual faculties are undeveloped and he has no contact with the eternal. Not until he is "born from above"[4] can he truly understand the spiritual values which comprise "the deep things of God" of which St. Paul speaks. Not until the natural man undergoes the regenerative change of conversion, does he have the first prerequisite for an understanding of the great message of the Bible. The actual comprehension of the divine things will come as the Spirit directs. Indeed, there is a very real sense in which Christians are the mere recipients of truth. It is well to note St. Paul's insistence upon the fact that God is the active agent who reveals the divine things through His Spirit. In other words,

[2] I Corinthians 2:9-12, 14.

[3] By "the natural man" Paul means anyone who has not experienced regeneration or, in the words of our Lord, has not been "born again" through faith in the Saviour.

[4] Cf. marginal reading of John 3:3.

true understanding of Scripture is conferred by the Grace of God solely on those who have met the prerequisite of being born again. Interpretation of God's Word that shows spiritual discernment is not the result of power of intellect or of any purely human attribute. Rather is it the free gift of God in the form of the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. This, then, is why the Spirit is so necessary for the proper functioning of the Bible "sundial."

The reader may well ask at this point how one may hope to interpret Scripture, if these things are true. Is the comprehension of God's Word entirely dependent upon the divine will? Has the individual no responsibility in the matter? Such questions as these might have to be answered in the affirmative, were it not for the fact of prayer. We know on the highest authority that God hears the prayer of the believing heart offered in Christ's name. We know further that prayers of this type are not only heard but answered. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name," said the Lord Jesus Christ, "that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." [5] There are many such promises. And, since they are promises of God, they stand forever. Consequently, we may pray for the illumination of the Spirit as

[5] John 14:13, 14.

we study the Bible. We may pray that God will send His Sun upon the dial of His Book. And as we pray, understanding of the divine message will come. For it may be set down as axiomatic that true discernment in the interpretation of God's Word is in direct ratio to the prayerfulness of the interpreter.

*The Law of Context.* Quite in contrast to the great primary prerequisite of spiritual discernment is the principle which we shall call the Law of Context. Someone has remarked with a good deal of wit and much truth that "a text without a context is a pretext." The same thought finds expression in another saying to the effect that "Scripture is like a railroad ticket—not good, if detached." And Peter, speaking, at the close of his second letter, of his "beloved Brother Paul," points out that in "Paul's epistles" are "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction."[6] Paul himself makes a significant assertion in II Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." The Greek for this verse is revealing. The word translated "rightly dividing" is a compound verb,

[6] II Peter 3:16.

used only in this instance in the New Testament. Its literal meaning is "to cut straight," and its general meaning "to handle aright."

The statements in the preceding paragraph emphasize a fact that is taken for granted in the interpretation of any type of literature. *Isolated passages are generally misleading if considered apart from their context.* Mere common sense supports the truth of this view. Every prominent public speaker suffers from its abuse by the newspapers. How often a totally false impression of a sermon or an address has resulted from publicity wrongly given to some single striking statement! Generally speaking, however, the student of secular literature is on guard against this error. Unfortunately, however, in regard to the Bible the "wresting" of Scripture to one's destruction has gone to unbelievable lengths. And it has gone to these lengths, sadly enough, in many cases through sheer mistaken zeal. Realizing that the Bible is God's inspired Word, the devout reader attaches peculiar importance to every statement it contains. This reverence is commendable, but when it descends to the practice of picking out single verses as proofs of all sorts of things, it becomes positively dangerous. Were this a sound method of interpretation, one could find Biblical support for nearly all the crimes on the

calendar, from drunkenness and murder to lying and deceit.

But the error needs no further comment. Its peril is perfectly obvious, and close adherence to the Law of Context will safeguard one from falling into its pitfalls.

*The Law of Literary Values.* This principle may be defined as follows: No interpretation of Scripture should be regarded as final until the literary form and accuracy of translation of the specific book or passage has been taken into consideration. The caution is necessary first of all because our English Bible is a translated book. The original literary forms are not readily apparent in the usual printing of the text. More than that, literary units are often arbitrarily broken up into chapters and verses that do positive violence to the higher values of the passages. When one is reading a poem, it is helpful to know from the manner of printing that he has poetry before him. Generally speaking, poetry printed as prose is obscure. Similarly it is helpful to know if one is reading a dramatic composition or an oration rather than simple prose.

In many instances the literary form has a direct bearing upon the meaning of the text. Consider, for example, the opening of the Lord's prayer. "Our

Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."[7] Practically everyone regards these words as a simple succession of phrases. In reality, however, their literary form is what is known as an "envelope figure," in which certain thoughts are enclosed between two main ideas. Moulton's arrangement makes the point clear.

Our Father which art in heaven:
Hallowed be thy Name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
In earth, as it is in heaven.

As the prayer is commonly printed, the words, "In earth, as it is in heaven" apply *only* to the clause, "Thy will be done." But the envelope form of the passage makes clear that the clause, "In earth, as it is in heaven" applies as well to the two preceding petitions, "Hallowed be thy name" and "Thy kingdom come." The meaning of the passage is thus enriched through an understanding of its literary form.[8]

For an example on a larger scale, consider the Song of Solomon or the Book of Job. Both are in

[7] Matthew 6: 9-10.

[8] Cf. Moulton, *The Literary Study of the Bible,* D. C. Heath and Co., pp. 65, 66.

dramatic form. The interpretation of the former actually hinges upon its literary characteristics; not until scholars grasped the fact that it is a drama was real progress made in unlocking its meaning.

Again, regard for the literary form of Scripture is a strong check against misinterpretation of the numerous passages where truth is stated symbolically or parabolically. Not all of the Book of Revelation, for instance, is to be understood literally. Much of it is in the form of symbolic visions, the language of which is figurative in the extreme. This same fact holds for large portions of Old Testament prophecy such as, Zechariah, Ezekiel, and notably Daniel. Behind the elaborate symbolism of such passages there lies the everlasting truth of God's message. Interpret them with slavish literalism and you have a meaningless jumble of ideas. Consider them as figurative expressions and the truth, for which the symbols are the outward vehicle, becomes apparent. Similarly, much of our Lord's teaching was by parables, whereby He enclosed His message in the setting of an idea, incident, or story. Here again, as in the case of prophetic symbolism, nothing is gained and much lost by the slavishly literal method of interpretation.

Of course, the line of demarcation between the figurative and the more common modes of speech

is by no means sharply defined. Symbolism, parable, and the more direct forms of expression are gradually merged, particularly in the poetic and rhetorical passages of Scripture. Where symbolism ceases and common speech begins is by no means always apparent. Nor can any fixed rule be set up as a criterion in these cases. Spiritual discernment alone can judge. As in all real Bible interpretation, the Spirit must intervene to illumine the Book for those who are perplexed by its difficulties.

From much of the foregoing it is evident that chapter and verse divisions do not by any means mark the logical and spiritual units of Scripture. Consequently, common sense dictates the warning that chapters or verses are not generally to be interpreted as separate units. Rather will the intelligent reader of the Bible soon learn to override wherever necessary these artificial barriers. Were any standard work of fiction chopped up piecemeal into hundreds of chapters and thousands of numbered verses, the interest of its appeal would be very seriously affected. These divisions, of course, are not part of the original text of Scripture. It is a remarkable tribute to the intrinsic readability of the Bible that, despite the handicap of chapter and verse division, it has retained for nearly two thousand years

its abiding interest for all sorts and conditions of men. It is essential, then, to subordinate chapter and verse to the higher divisions suggested by literary form and the context of thought and spiritual truth.

Another caution having to do with this Law of Literary Form is that, in cases of doubt, the correctness of the translation must always be verified. The Bible was written originally in Hebrew and in Greek. The Authorized, or King James, Version, our finest translation from a literary point of view, was made more than three hundred years ago. Since then, new and valuable ancient manuscripts of both Old and New Testaments have been discovered. Textual criticism has been developed to a high degree of efficiency. As a result, many inaccuracies of rendering have been corrected. With the various revised versions at hand, with an analytical concordance, with reliable commentaries, and with the help of dictionaries of the Bible languages, the reader need not know Greek or Hebrew to verify the original meaning of a given passage. He has in his mother tongue the means whereby he may determine the correctness of most of the obscure translations.

*The Law of Comparison.* In reality this principle is an extension of the Law of Context previously

stated. Just as no single verse or passage is to be interpreted apart from its immediate setting, so no portion of Scripture should be given final interpretation until it has been examined in the light of the Bible *as a whole*. It is not to be interpreted without reference to other Scripture, and is not to be isolated from its relation to the entire Word of God. Recalling the fundamental fact of the organic unity of the Bible will show the necessity for this injunction. The various parts of an organism are not disparate and without relation one to another. Rather are they bound together by the ties of life itself, each organ functioning only in relation to its fellow organs and to the whole. So with the individual portions of the Bible; they are each of them vitally linked, both separately and collectively, to that unique organism of thought and spirit which we call the Word of God.

Reasoning on the basis of this figure, the logic of the Law of Comparison becomes evident. How does the scientist determine the significance of any organ of the body, for instance? How does he interpret its value to the physical life? Only, of course, by observing it as it functions in relation and in comparison with other organs and the body as a whole. Thus it is with the Bible. Comparison of the individual passage with the rest of Scripture

is essential if one is to interpret its true significance. Often, as a truth is repeated after its primary statement in Scripture, the repetition throws added light upon the original truth. A good example of this process of enrichment by progressive, repetitive statement is found in Genesis, where the great Abrahamic Covenant is first set forth in chapter twelve and then upon successive announcement added to and broadened in scope. It is in this way that many of the great doctrines of Scripture are built up; they are not so much expounded in full as they are promulgated by successive passages bearing on the common theme. Now, if just one of the isolated passages dealing, for instance, with a truth of such major importance as redemption is taken alone, a complete view of the great theme of redemption cannot necessarily be obtained. In other words, interpretation consists not only in analyzing "the word of truth," but it also presupposes a putting together or a synthesis. And this is accomplished by prayerful study of a comparative nature.

*The Law of the Scope of Scripture.* As we have already seen in discussing the Law of Spiritual Discernment, the Bible has a single great purpose. It was given to reveal the love of God as manifested in the divine provision of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is its aim, and sound inter-

pretation must never lose sight of this aim. Consequently, it is a serious and misleading error to regard the Bible as a source book on science, philosophy, or any subject other than its central theme of the Deity in relation to humanity. After all, there is a proper scope of Scripture, a scope determined not by individual writers, inspired though they were, but by the divine Author of it all. One cannot hold the Bible accountable for fields of knowledge outside the scope delimited by the divine purpose of the book. For instance, it is folly to insist that Scripture is a final compendium of scientific knowledge or a complete historical record of ancient man. It is neither of these, because it is so much more, being an authoritative record of God's dealings with humanity to the end that man might be reconciled to God.

Yet, although the Bible is not a textbook of science or history or any other specific and limited field of knowledge, still it speaks with authority whenever it touches upon these subjects. Scripture statements having to do with scientific matters are invariably correct. Bible history is true, as the spade of the archeologist constantly proves. For the Bible is God's inspired Word. Therefore, it cannot be inaccurate; the eternal Father is omniscient and His revelation cannot contain untruth. The ability of

God to produce a complete historical or scientific treatise can hardly be questioned. However, it was evidently not in His providence to do so. Such things He left unrevealed as a stimulating challenge to the intelligence of mankind. But the things which man could never seek out through the exercise of his reasoning and inventive faculties, these God in His infinite wisdom set forth completely and finally in Scripture.

To attempt, therefore, to treat the Bible as a textbook on miscellaneous subjects unrelated to its central purpose is to court confusion in interpretation. A saying attributed to the scientist Galileo has put in vivid manner the point at issue. "The Bible was given not to tell us how the heavens go, but to tell us how to go to heaven."

*The Law of the Proper Use of Scripture.* The tendency toward radicalism and unbelief in Biblical scholarship is these days so marked that most writers of conservative outlook are zealous, and rightly so, in their warning against destructive criticism. On the other hand, orthodoxy has its dangers, among which is the danger that may be termed the improper use of the Bible. The point is one that needs to be made with great discretion. Perhaps the following statement will clarify the issue: Proper use of the Bible must always be both reverent and prayer-

ful, and true interpretation must be guided by the Spirit, but reverence for Scripture must never be degraded to a regard for the book that in its unreasonable lack of balance approaches superstition. Such a tendency is the direct antithesis of the radically critical attitude toward the Bible. Like its opposite, it represents an extreme, and extremes are generally dangerous.

By way of illustration, let it be plainly stated that the Bible is not to be regarded as a book of divination. It is hardly a proper use of God's book for one who is in doubt to open it at random with eyes closed, place his finger upon the pages, and then to consider the verse thus indicated as a divine message. Such chance practices not only dishonor Scripture, but also disregard the fundamental rules of interpretation. God's Word is sacred, and to handle it in such a manner savors more of superstition than of reverence. For those in trouble and in need of guidance it is the unfailing source of direction, but its pages usually yield guidance only after careful and prayerful study. And certainly, true interpretation of its great messages comes to hearts that are prepared through hours of prayer and study rather than to the seeker who depends upon the glimpses of truth incidental to the turning of a page.

Similarly there is comparatively little virtue attached to the mere reading of a portion of Scripture unless the mind and soul are sensitive to the divine and momentous nature of that which is being read. Often something intrinsically good is sadly lowered through the unthinking familiarity that breeds contempt. Daily Bible reading has been instilled in many of us as a habit (and a splendid habit it is!), yet it is all too easy to regard the perfunctory fulfillment of this duty as a beneficial spiritual exercise. The fact of the matter is that no amount of perfunctory, thoughtless reading, reading merely to perform a pious duty, is of spiritual help. Nor can it lead to spiritual insight into Scripture. A verse or chapter of the Bible read with wandering attention of a mind worn out by the strenuous activity of study, business, or the frenzied pursuit of pleasure simply does not register upon the spiritual faculties. The fact that the words are Holy Scripture is of no avail. God wants the undivided attention of the reader of His book, and true reverence demands that it be read with alert mind. It is for this reason that the morning is so far preferable to the night as the time for daily Bible study. Surely God's Word is deserving of a few moments at the time of day when the mind is keenest and the power of concentration most vigorous.

*The Law of Perseverance and Patience.* By no means all of the Bible is clear to him who would understand its messages. Even the most devout scholar, reverent and careful in method of study, finds much that is beyond his perception and that eludes his most consecrated search. And, if this be the case for the mature Bible student, for the beginner it is doubly true. Large portions of Scripture seem incomprehensible to his eager mind. The path of interpretation seems beset with difficulties. Yet the simple virtue of perseverance accomplishes wonders in the understanding of hard places. Keeping at the difficulty with prayerful persistence often brings startling enlightenment.

However, when enlightenment fails to come, even after persistent and reverent study, an attitude of patient waiting is frequently of help. There is great value in the faculty of suspended judgment. The ability to hold a final opinion in abeyance until further light comes is a powerful adjunct to the understanding of God's written revelation. The mind that can keep final judgment suspended while patiently awaiting further evidence will avoid many of the pitfalls which lead the less patient thinker into error. And the forming of quick judgments is often the sign of shallow thinking. In Bible study particularly is it essential to consider and weigh all the

available evidence before reaching conclusions. The great themes of God's Word demand an open mind and a receptive heart, if the divine truth is to be rightly understood. Forming final judgments prematurely is the sure road to narrowness and even bigotry.[9] And that bigotry which is forever committed to one set of opinions is at the farthest remove from sound interpretation, for no man is ever possessed of complete understanding of the unfathomable revelation of God.

Against the perils of superficiality and the discouraging difficulties of obscure passages, then, the attitude of suspended judgment and the practice of perseverance constitute the most effective of safeguards.

[9] It is well to remember that liberalism as well as orthodoxy may be bigoted. Often the skeptic is more intolerant in his lack of belief than the most hidebound conservative in his acceptance of the creeds.

# APPENDIX

# QUESTIONS AND TOPICS

## *Chapter One*

1. Do you think that the average man has an intelligent knowledge of the Bible? Explain the reason for your answer.
2. Why is a knowledge of the Bible both valuable and necessary?
3. Locate three tributes of great men to the Bible in addition to those given in this chapter. Write out these tributes.
4. Write out your answers to the ten questions asked in this chapter. (Use a Bible, but *not* a reference Bible or Bible dictionary.)
5. On the basis of your experience in answering these ten questions, do you find that you have much or little to learn about the Bible?
6. Do you think that Bible study is a small or a large subject? Why?
7. What are some things that we should endeavor to gain in studying the Bible?

## *Chapter Two*

1. Write a paragraph explaining the authorship of the Bible.

2. Name twenty Old Testament writers and ten New Testament writers.
3. In what languages was the Bible written?
4. What can you say regarding the original manuscripts of the Bible?
5. Write in outline form an argument for the authenticity of the text of Scripture using the classics as a basis of comparison.
6. How are most textual errors in the Bible explained?
7. Write a paragraph on the formation of the canon.
8. Summarize in their correct order the various Bible translations down through the "modern" versions.
9. Which is the greatest English translation? Why?

## *Chapter Three*

1. Explain the importance of the question of Biblical inspiration.
2. Explain the meaning of the word "inspiration."
3. State carefully two reasons for believing the Bible to be an inspired book.
4. Give a detailed explanation of II Timothy 3:16.
5. Give a detailed explanation of II Peter 1:21.

6. Explain the significance of Christ's reference to Scripture in John 10: 35.
7. Define verbal inspiration.
8. Give some reasons for the truth of the theory of verbal inspiration.
9. Distinguish between inspiration and revelation.
10. Show how the distinction between inspiration and revelation is important.

## *Chapter Four*

1. What does structure of any kind point to? Give proof of your answer.
2. Show how your answer to the above question applies to the Bible.
3. How is the underlying structure of a book or a work of art discovered?
4. Explain carefully the symbolism of numbers as found in the Bible.
5. Explain the key to the structure of Scripture.
6. Draw from memory a chart showing the structure of Scripture.
7. Write a detailed explanation of this chart.

## *Chapter Five*

1. At what point is human creative power definitely limited?

2. Find and quote a definition of an organism. Show carefully how the Bible fulfills the requirements of this definition.
3. Explain why the fact that the Bible is an organism proves conclusively that humanity alone could not have produced it.

### *Chapter Six*

1. What is the great purpose of the Bible?
2. Write an explanation of God's plan of salvation, using at least twelve Scripture references to prove your points.
3. Explain carefully seven guiding principles for Bible study. (Make frequent references to Scripture.)
4. Write on the importance of the idea of monotheism.

### *Chapter Seven*

1. Explain why it is logical to believe that God has a plan for the future of the world.
2. How does the Bible divide world-history?
3. Explain the meaning of the term "dispensation."
4. Explain why there are seven dispensations rather than one dispensation.
5. Explain the conditions laid down by God, man's response, and the final outcome of each dis-

pensation. (Refer to Scripture as much as possible in your answer.)

6. What do the dispensations show us regarding God's character?

## *Chapter Eight*

1. Show the relation of the dispensations to the covenants.
2. Explain the meaning of the term "covenant."
3. Explain the implications of the covenant idea as found in Scripture.
4. What do the covenants show us about God?
5. Explain carefully the eight covenants, stating in each case the provisions of each and illustrating your explanation, wherever possible, with Scripture.

## *Chapter Nine*

1. Is it right for the Christian to confine his reading and study of the Bible to a few favorite passages? Explain the reasons for your answer.
2. Why is prophecy a comparatively neglected portion of Scripture?
3. Explain the importance of prophecy.

4. Write a careful explanation of the general nature of prophecy and prophets.
5. Show in detail what the first part of Isaiah 7 tells of the characteristics of prophecy.
6. Show what the book of Joel tells of the nature of prophecy.
7. What is the great theme of prophecy? Trace this theme in the Old Testament, giving references.
8. Write on the twofold picture of Christ, as presented by the prophets.
9. Write on unfulfilled prophecy, giving some examples.
10. Does the fact of prophecy, particularly that which has been fulfilled, have any bearing on the question of the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible? Explain your answer.

## *Chapter Ten*

1. How should the Bible be read?
2. What obligations has the reader of the Bible?
3. Explain carefully, using examples from the Bible, seven laws of Scripture interpretation.
4. Find in the Bible some examples (not cited in this chapter) that illustrate the practical value of these laws of Scripture interpretation.

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